

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

Executive Summary

The Council has a bold vision to be in constant communication with residents and to have an embedded culture of consultation in how it operates and makes decisions that are in the best interests of the communities of Woking Borough Council.

Investment has been made into an on-line civic engagement digital platform, the Woking Community Forum, and a representative Residents' Panel has been established. At the time of this report the Woking Community Forum has already hosted engagement on a number of key projects including:

- Housing Strategy;
- Economic Development Action Plan for Woking's recovery 2021-2023;
- Planet Woking; and
- Public Spaces Protection Order for Woking Town Centre.

A series of community roadshows took place between November and December 2021 alongside an engagement questionnaire. The purpose of this engagement was to obtain community feedback in order to inform and influence the corporate priorities for the Council. An independent report providing analysis of the feedback from the questionnaire was commissioned and is attached in the appendices 2 and 3 of this report. An initial response from the Executive of the Council to this engagement was webcast on 11th January 2022.

The purpose of this report is to provide analysis of the feedback from communities through the engagement roadshows and questionnaire which took place between November and December 2021. It provides an early initial response to, and analysis of, the feedback that we commissioned from an independent engagement company.

The Council will be producing a more comprehensive response to the engagement showing the actions taken as a result of the feedback. This response will be reported to the meeting of the Executive on 24th March 2022 alongside the 2022- 27 Corporate Plan.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RESOLVE That the following be noted:

- (i) feedback analysis from the Community engagement roadshows and questionnaire; and
- (ii) a full response will be presented to the meeting of the Executive on 24 March 2022 alongside the 2022- 2027 Corporate Plan.

Reasons for Decision

Reason: To update Members on the community engagement feedback and next steps.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

Background Papers: None.

Reporting Person: Julie Fisher, Chief Executive
Email: julie.fisher@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3333

Contact Person: Andy Denner, Marketing Communications Manager
Email: andy.denner@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3026

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ayesha Azad
Email: cllrayesha.azad@woking.gov.uk

Shadow Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ann-Marie Barker
Email: cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk

Date Published: 12 January 2022

Community Engagement and Consultation

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council has a bold vision to be in constant communication with residents and to have an embedded culture of consultation in how it operates and makes decisions that are in the best interests of the communities of the Woking Borough.
- 1.2 Investment has been made into an on-line civic engagement digital platform, the Woking Community Forum, and a representative Residents' Panel has been established. At the time of this report the Woking Community Forum has already hosted engagement on a number of key projects including:
 - Housing Strategy;
 - Economic Development Action Plan for Woking's recovery 2021-2023;
 - Planet Woking; and
 - Public Spaces Protection Order for Woking Town Centre.
- 1.3 The first meeting of the Residents' Panel was on the 7th July. It was webcast from the Council Chamber and also accommodated some socially distanced in person attendance from Residents' Panel members. On the night we responded to in excess of 60 questions about the Council's activity. There are in excess of 750 residents who have registered to be on the Panel, and they provide a good representation of our resident community for us to undertake detailed engagement on the issues that are of the greatest importance to them.
- 1.4 The Council faces significant financial challenges and it also has an ambitious development and growth agenda. It is critical that the views of residents, businesses, partners and staff are sought in setting out a clear vision for the future and clear priorities that will guide the development of our five-year Corporate Plan for 2022-2027.
- 1.5 Our vision for community engagement, the activity we have already delivered and the plans we are putting in place will establish a culture of trust as we collectively invest in the future for the communities of the Borough. Our engagement approach will enable the Council to understand what people value and what their hopes are for the future to help us shape a Borough that works for all. It will provide a shared vision about what people want Woking to be like as a place to live and work and set out our priorities.
- 1.6 The community engagement plan will provide the approach to a programme of constant communication with residents and communities so that feedback forms part of decision making and setting the corporate priorities for the Council.
- 1.7 A series of community roadshows took place between November and December 2021 alongside an engagement questionnaire, to obtain community feedback, to inform and influence the corporate priorities for the Council. An independent report providing analysis of the feedback from the questionnaire was commissioned and is attached in the appendices 2 and 3 of this report. An initial response from the Executive of the Council to this engagement was webcast on 11th January 2022.
- 1.8 The Council has determined that residents' views should influence the Council's five-year Corporate Plan for 2022-2027. To fulfil this commitment, an online questionnaire was hosted on the Council's engagement hub, Woking Community Forum. In addition, 3,000 paper copies were sent to randomly selected households across the borough and eight engagement roadshows were hosted at key community-based locations. The roadshows presented the Council's commitment to listen to residents and give a voice to the wider community.

Community Engagement and Consultation

- 1.9 The consultation questionnaire received 979 responses in total: 678 online and 301 via post. 416 verbatim comments were received, and 151 residents showed an interest in joining the Residents' Panel.
- 1.10 The eight roadshows were held at different venues across the borough, including one in the Council Chamber. In total, 161 people attended, including 16 councillors. An informal session with 11 students at Woking Sixth Form College was held with the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council.

2.0 Consultation and Roadshow Summary

- 2.1 Attached at Appendices 2 and 3 are the independent reports and analysis of the Community Engagement Roadshows and engagement questionnaire.
- 2.2 Climate change and sustainability was a strong and consistent feature raised at the engagement roadshows. In the questionnaire responses it was regarded as being 'more important' than many other issues but is not seen as being in most need of improvement. This may be in recognition of the strong approach that the Council has taken to date.
- 2.3 Building on the Climate change priority, quantitative feedback from the questionnaires highlights seven further priority areas from communities that are considered to be both the most important and most in need of improvement. These priorities were also raised during the roadshows:
 - Keeping the borough a safe place for everyone
 - Taking action where required, to deal with anti-social behaviour
 - Having a council that listens to residents and where everyone can 'have their say'
 - Providing support for older, vulnerable people
 - Taking steps to improve traffic flows across the borough
 - Making it easier to travel around Woking Borough and the surrounding areas
 - Encouraging vibrant village high streets by supporting local business
- 2.4 There were a further three corporate priorities that a significant number of respondents said need improvement, which were also mentioned as priorities during the roadshows, but were seen as less important than the seven above:
 - Tackling homelessness and its causes
 - Supporting new and established local businesses and shops
 - Providing more high-quality affordable and key worker homes, to meet the needs of local people
- 2.5 It is recognised that not all issues/priorities are under the direct responsibility of the Council. However, only 16% of residents said the Council 'do enough to influence their public sector partners' and many of the comments raised during the roadshows centred on issues such as the condition of road surfaces, cycle ways, traffic congestion and road closures, provision of medical facilities, public transport and pressure on existing infrastructure. Work needs to be carried out to illustrate to communities that the Council does work with partners to advocate for communities and ensure that partners understand the issues that affect residents' day to day living.
- 2.6 There was a good representation of responses from the consultation across the ten Woking wards. Forty-five responses represented an organisation or community group, whilst 26 local business owners completed the survey. Ninety-eight responses from Council employees meant roughly a third responded. In future, more work needs to be done to engage local organisations, groups, and businesses, which will be reflected in the engagement plan for 2022/23.

Community Engagement and Consultation

2.7 Engagement from communities at the roadshow events was largely on matters that affected them on a day to day basis, rather than corporate objectives that were outlined in the survey. Key themes that were discussed across all the roadshows were:

- Provision of affordable housing
- Highways: Volumes and speed of traffic and condition of roads
- The Council: investment strategy, financial stability, commitment to consultation
- Climate Change and Sustainability: how the council are supporting this, how can it adapt its policies, encouraging people to use their cars less, electric vehicle charging
- Woking Town Centre: redevelopment, town centre economy, traffic congestion.
- Sustainable Transport: enhancement of cycleways, footpaths, public bus services
- Support services for vulnerable people: mental health, homelessness
- Local villages: how the council are supporting these local economies
- Parking: lack of provision, lack of enforcement, new homes and parking spaces
- Partnership working with Surrey County Council, Surrey Police, the NHS, developers and others

2.8 The roadshows provided a good foundation to build levels of trust, with open discussion around matters important to residents. From the feedback responses from attendees of events

- 91% said they felt they had the opportunity to have their say
- 95% were pleased they attended
- 95% said they would attend another roadshow.

2.9 Within the questionnaire there were 2 “free text” areas where respondents were asked about specific priorities. We received in excess of 400 responses and we are analysing these for the report to the March Executive meeting. From an initial high-level analysis, the responses were:

- ‘if the Council had more money to invest’, with the top three spending priorities being:
 - 41% environmental initiatives e.g. relating to Climate Change, sustainability, flooding
 - 35% more affordable, low-cost housing for local people
 - 25% investment in services and support for children, teenagers, older residents
- ‘If the Council had to make cost savings’, residents top three suggested areas were:
 - 53% said spend less on Corporate and Democratic Services
 - 30% reduce expenditure on Place Making
 - 14% Health, Wellbeing and Cultural Development

3.0 Demographics

3.1 Respondents of both the questionnaire and attendance at the roadshows was not representative of the diversity of the Borough’s population

3.2 90% of responses to the survey were from ‘White British’ or ‘Any Other White’ background, whilst only 3% were from an ‘Indian’ or ‘Pakistani’ background. In the 2011 Census, 8% of residents were from these two backgrounds.

3.3 The profile of residents attending the roadshows were in the main older and from a White British background. In future, thought needs to be given in the forward engagement plan, to address this issue and ensure that the voices heard are representative of the borough.

4.0 Community Feedback Priorities

- 4.1 The key priorities identified by communities, highlighted in points 2.2 to 2.4 of this report above, are currently being reflected on and evaluated as to how they can inform the Corporate Plan, underpinning the Council's commitment to involve residents in the decision-making process. A full response will be presented to the 24th March 2022 meeting of the Executive, alongside the Corporate Plan.
- 4.2 In advance of this full response, there are areas that we can highlight where the Council has and is prioritising Council activity on the areas that are high priority for communities. Attached at Appendix 1 to this report are initial reflections on what the Council is already delivering and what it is looking to take forward.

5.0 Next Steps

- 5.1 An engagement plan for 2022/23 is being drafted and will focus on developing a more representative demographic of residents, incorporating businesses, community groups, partners and organisations.
- 5.2 A key priority is to continue to cultivate a more engaged way of working with residents, thereby improving trust and confidence in the Council. Proposals are being developed for a further series of roadshows and engagement activity during 2022/23, building on the priorities and themes from the roadshows and consultation in 2021.

6.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 6.1 There are no financial or risk implications arising from the report

Equalities and Human Resources

- 6.2 No specific Human Resource or Training and Development implications.
- 6.3 There are no equalities implications.

Legal

- 6.4 None identified at this time.

7.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 7.1 Any implications are directly referenced in the report

REPORT ENDS

Community Feedback Priorities

Climate Change

Actions completed:

- Robust climate policies captured within Woking's Core Strategy and other development plan documents
- Installation of Combined Heat and Power network in Woking Town Centre

Actions to be implemented:

- The Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) sets out the actions that the Council is prioritising for delivery, individually and in partnership with other organisations.
- Further proposed actions are set out in the 'Tackling Climate Change Locally' report to be considered by the Executive on the same agenda as this report on 20th January 2022.

Specific actions are to include:

- Adoption of a revised Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document
- Liaise with external partners to maximise the provision of charging points for e-vehicles across the wider Borough, utilising Government funding and commercial support when available
- Review Woking 2050, the Council's climate change strategy, to incorporate the Council's pledge for carbon neutrality and the climate emergency action plan
- Continue to provide access to Government grants to deliver household energy efficiency improvements for eligible residents through Action Surrey

Keeping the borough a safe place for everyone

The Community Safety team contributes to ongoing work such as Community Harm and Risk Management (CHaRMM) and the Joint Action Group (JAG) meetings, as well as several events and campaigns that help keep the Borough safe.

These include yearly events such as Junior Citizen, which is aimed at all Year 6 pupils, Anti-Social Behaviour Awareness Week which is now a national event each July and Domestic Abuse Awareness Week which is a Surrey wide event held in June. We also support Surrey Police with their ongoing programmes, such as County Lines intensification weeks, crime prevention work and ongoing campaigns specific to them – recently this was E scooters in the Borough. This work also includes the implementation of the Safer Streets 3 funding for improvements along the canal.

Work will also continue with any identified group, organisation or charity to support work that they are undertaking that will be beneficial to the residents of Woking, such as Women's Support Centre, York Road Project, Woking Street Angels etc.

Taking steps to improve traffic flows across the borough

Actions completed:

- Significant investment in the public realm within Woking Town Centre to allow safer cycle and pedestrian movements
- Lockfield Drive traffic flow and vehicle capacity improvements at the Victoria Way junction
- Introduction of smart signal equipment through the town centre to allow signals to communicate better. When construction work is completed in the town centre, traffic will be able to flow through the town and not be stopped at each set of lights. This will improve carbon emissions as well as assist with the traffic flow.

Actions to be implemented:

- Identify more opportunities for cyclists and pedestrians to get around Woking, including accessible infrastructure and the provision of secure cycle parking facilities.

Community Engagement and Consultation

- Ambition to work with Surrey County Council on key agenda items including:
 - A245 corridor improvements to include smarter highway measures (there will need to be some hard measures as well)
 - Woking Town Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan
 - The Woking Sustainable Transport Package Phase Two.

Making it easier to travel around Woking Borough and the surrounding areas

Actions completed:

- Relating to the town centre:
 - Chertsey Road has had cycle and pedestrian improvements
 - Introduction of a bus lane and contra flow cycle lane along the High Street allows direct access for cyclists to the station and town centre
 - A new toucan crossing at Victoria Way allows cyclists and pedestrians to cross together, creating improved accessibility for cyclists to the town centre
 - A new bus stop at Bedser Bridge allows easy access to the town by bus
 - Albion/Station Plaza Square has seen the removal of through traffic and improvements for bus travel, pedestrians and cyclists
 - Improvements to public realm and pedestrian travel at Dukes Court
 - Chobham Road cycle bridge has new linkage for cyclists and pedestrians from the north side to town side of the canal

Actions to be implemented:

An aspirational list of future partnership working with Surrey as the Highway Authority:

- Woking Town Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) Delivery Phase 1 - Woking Town LCWIP identified walk/cycle improvements to deliver recommended corridor improvements. The LCWIP proposed improvements on several corridors, so a phased approach is proposed to make delivery more manageable
- Victoria Arch scheme widening scheme - a £115 million highways enhancement scheme to support Woking town centre's future growth.
- Woking and Esher railway station hubs and access - Improve access by all modes between rail stations and town centres, key employment locations and residential. Also, improvements to the station and hub amenities e.g. shelter, cycle parking, security measures. Package covering railway stations in Woking and Elmbridge.
- Hermitage Road cycle bridge - Parallel dedicated pedestrian and cycle bridge adjacent to existing A324 Hermitage Road bridge, Brookwood, plus c. 150m of cycle track to connect the two sections of the Saturn Trail
- Woking Sustainable Transport Package Phase 2 - Further improvements to walking and cycling, to and from Woking town centre informed by Woking's LCWIP; Quality Bus Corridors in directions of Brooklands, Sheerwater, Byfleet, Send, Westfield, Kingfield, Mayford and Old Woking
- Six crossroads junction smarter highway - Capacity and safety improvements at Six Crossroads major A320/A245 junction
- A245 smarter highway West Byfleet to Painshill - Road modernisation and capacity improvement between West Byfleet and Painshill, including new traffic technology
- Bridge widening at Byfleet and New Haw

Providing more high-quality affordable and key worker homes to meet the needs of people

Actions completed:

- The first 46 affordable homes, part of the Sheerwater Regeneration Scheme, have been completed and work is progressing on two small sites for new council homes
- A review of the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document is underway
- Seeking to prioritise key workers for any new "First Homes" (new Government scheme) built in the Borough
- Providing more high-quality affordable and key worker homes to meet the needs of local people

Community Engagement and Consultation

- Adoption of a Site Allocations Development Plan Document setting out detailed expectations for housing sites including the delivery of affordable housing
- Securing new affordable housing from larger scale developments via the planning application process

Actions to be implemented:

- Future adoption of an amended affordable housing Supplementary Planning Document

Encouraging vibrant village high streets by supporting local businesses

Actions completed:

- Supporting Neighbourhood Planning
- Supporting the West Byfleet regeneration
- Officers visit and engages with businesses across the borough, offering advice and support, marketing and promotion
- Introduced MyTownShops Woking to provide businesses with an online presence that offers a click and collect or delivery service

Actions to be implemented:

- Priorities within the Economic Development Action Plan are to ensure that the boroughs town and village commercial centres and high streets are resilient and flexible to maintain competitive advantages. These include:
 - Online is here to stay: Encouraging our smaller businesses in the town and village centres to have an on-line as well as a physical presence
 - Clean and contactless: Helping retail and other people-facing businesses to move to smart technology
 - All-round experience: Encouraging niche and specialist retailers and services in town and village centres to offer a wider range of opportunities, not just shopping

Tacking homelessness and its causes

Actions completed:

- Working in partnership with the York Road Project to offer rough sleepers extra support and accommodation following the “Everyone In” initiative
- Opened the Council’s temporary accommodation scheme just before Christmas
- Expanded our Floating Support offer for homeless families, including a specialist Housing and Mental Health Support Worker, seconded from Woking Mind

Taking action where required, to deal with anti-social behaviour

New Vision Homes have re-introduced a dedicated Anti-Social Behaviour Manager post, which will come in-house in April 2022

Having a council that listens to residents, and where everyone can ‘have their say’

Actions completed:

- Woking Residents’ Panel has been established, where the views of panellists have helped to shape the Councils’ vision for the future
- A community consultation and eight engagement roadshows were held during November and December 2021 to allow residents to influence the Council’s five-year Corporate Plan for 2022-2027 and three-year Medium-Term Financial Strategy
- Your borough, your budget tool launched which allows residents to prioritise spending across the Council’s key service areas
- Woking Community Forum launched which allows residents to have their say about issues that are important to them

Actions to be implemented:

- Establish a panel for tenant and leaseholder engagement
- Establish a tenant and leaseholder area on the Woking Community Forum site

Community Engagement and Consultation

- Active response to Government consultations to represent the voice of communities of the Borough Woking and publish a Community Engagement Plan
- Develop a calendar of community engagement with a target of six sharing and listening events over the year
- Develop a commissioning prospectus
- To use our representation on the Members Board of the District Councils' Network to collaborate, strengthen the voice of District and Borough Councils and influence national policy
- To continue to support the scrutiny of the Councils strategies to strengthen democratic accountability

Providing support for older, vulnerable people

Actions completed:

- The Extra Care Housing scheme was launched at Hale End Court in Old Woking
- Byfleet Care Club at St Marys in Byfleet has opened to provide support and respite for those residents living with dementia and their carers.

Actions to be implemented:

- The Council will update policy to assist more residents being discharged from hospital with facilities they require to allow them to remain independent at home

Supporting new and established local businesses and shops to create more local jobs

Actions completed:

- Major Woking Town centre investment and regeneration including Victoria Square
- Commencement of the Woking Town Centre Masterplan
- Approval of a revised Economic Development Action Plan
- Between March 2020 and September 2021, the Council distributed over 4860 grants totalling £27,381,704.44 to local businesses across various schemes. The Council provided a wide range of business support both directly and through Woking Works, as well as helping businesses access government support, providing advice and help with a range of issues including:
 - Over 650 interactions with businesses including one-to-one support with business advisers and support for strategy, business plans and marketing, as well as start-up support and continued engagement with businesses throughout 2020/21
 - Directly contacted business owners and business managers on the high streets and villages across Woking Borough to offer advice and support on grant applications or other government initiatives
 - Supported the #WeAreWoking campaign, to encourage customers back onto the high street and to 'shop local'
- A comprehensive amount of services are offered to support new and established businesses including:
 - Resilience planning via 1-2-1 Business Support clinics as part of the Woking Business Growth service
 - Business directory of Woking businesses
 - Start Up Woking is aimed at providing support to start-ups
 - A jobs' board

Actions to be implemented:

- Approval and implementation of the Woking Town Centre masterplan
- Implement digital strategy
- Destination Woking