

# **Norwich City Council**

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Item No 7**

#### **REPORT for meeting to be held on 15 October 2020**

#### **Norwich City Council response to Enhancing community development following Covid-19**

##### **Summary:**

Norwich City Council has long been committed to encouraging and supporting community led action of all types, which can be seen through projects like LUMI which was developed by the council to support grassroots organisations and individuals.

During the recent crisis, both existing and new groups took fundamental roles in delivering much needed services like food deliveries, medication collections, signposting to partner agencies and general befriending activities, and demonstrated that areas with high social capital were better able to support one another. Many of the new groups which emerged remain as small, grassroots residents groups are looking to continue their improved neighbourliness and the council has a careful and at times delicate role to play in nurturing this. There is also a role for the council to understand in which areas this did not happen organically and if there are any ways in which we can invite residents to work alongside us to understand why and potentially catalyze new activity.

Community development has been at the core of the council corporate objectives for many years and in places this will look to build on existing projects and work, look at opportunities to do better and pilot new ideas. It will also be important, to embed this approach across council teams and services so residents feel able to shape and contribute to the improvements of the city as a whole, increasing their sense of agency and their social capital, and leading to services which better match the needs of residents.

The council's covid recovery blueprint includes actions which further enhance community development, namely:

- Creating a blueprint for citizen participation within the city incorporating LUMI
- embedding an asset-based and place-based approach to working
- testing new models of service delivery which involve residents
- participating in national and global discussions on how best to achieve this
- understanding the role of communications better to encourage social action
- reduction of bureaucracy in allowing residents more control over their own lives and neighbourhoods

There was also worked picked up in 2019 on the role of the ward councillor which can be revised to ensure councillors are aware of all options open to their residents in terms of support and guidance.



**Conclusions:**

The report provides members with key information on how the council plans to continue and evolve community development works, and the development of the work to embed this council wide.

**Recommendation:**

That the scrutiny committee considers the information presented at this meeting and considers:

- (1) How members might contribute to developing the Citizen Participation Blueprint
- (2) How the role of members within community development can be supported and enhanced
- (3) Suggestions or recommendations it may wish to make to support activity being developed; and
- (4) Any other recommendations the committee wishes to make

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## Report

### Context

1. People who feel they have the ability to make a positive change in their lives and community have an improved sense of themselves and this is a positive impact on their wellbeing. Improved relationships with citizens, especially those in marginalized communities, improves wellbeing and social capital which in turn improves life chances and sense of agency. It links to wellbeing, social mobility, health, inequality and more which makes it vital to invest in.
2. When agencies such as local government ask people who live where we work to inform our thinking, we are better able to get things right first time which improves outcomes and efficiency. People who live in the area know it better than those who do not and residents with lived experience understand complex situations better than those looking in. As a council the quality of our services improve and getting further upstream to look at prevention not crisis interventions, as well as improving the compliance where people buy into decisions they help make.
3. Stronger, resilient communities are better able to look after themselves and therefore need less costly council interventions. This was well demonstrated in the Covid-19 response and neighbourhood support thrived which meant that residents needs were met where they lived and did not need council services. It is worth noting this tends to happen more in affluent communities so more support and guidance is needed in deprived neighbourhoods.
4. Citizen participation allows for support in maintenance of public spaces as well as less physical support in terms of befriending and social inclusion. There may be long term cost savings but the driver must be doing the right thing and savings would follow.
5. There is a possibility of offering too much support which creates dependency whereas too little exacerbates inequality so the line needed in terms of walking will always be narrow. It requires better clarity on what the council does and doesn't do and a better understanding for residents of where the council sits alongside other agencies such as the County Council, Police and CCG within the city's social infrastructure.
6. This is also fundamental in supporting the wider development of the council in terms of culture change and power shift, as working in this way empowers not only citizens but officers which leads to innovative ideas being brought forward and more fulfilling roles.

### What within our control impacts community development?

7. **'Neighbourliness' development** – Mobilizing citizens to support one another. Understanding and developing those who came forward as part of the covid-19 response developing mutual aid groups and the transition to more general community support and better understanding of what it means to be an active citizen.



8. **Asset usage** – Looking at existing assets and how their alternate usage may better deliver on local priorities, including community asset transfer and grant in kind rentals. Refocusing on the value of the usage in the community, as much as the value in income and understanding how to evidence this well.
9. **Equality and inequality** – Defining equality impact assessments and project development to support making all council services and projects more accessible and more focused on the end user. Focusing on the voices we usually hear the least and being proactive in how we do that. Understanding that social capital and a sense of agency has a positive impact on the wider determinants of a happy life but also present significant barriers so both understanding these and focusing on reducing them will be key.
10. **Communication** – language is key and how you ask is as important as the fact that you do. What we don't say matters as much as what we do when building trusting relationships with residents. This includes formal and more informal communication, messaging, methods and frequency.
11. **Growth and development** – both in engaging citizens for their specialist local knowledge to inform development and also in working alongside the existing community where development occurs to help welcome new neighbours without creating a "new" community within an existing one to ensure integration and inclusion.
12. **Officer engagement and empowerment** – ensuring officers have the right and expectation to disrupt where needed and be flexible and agile in making the right decisions. Staff training and skill development around asking the right questions interpreting and acting on feedback. Inter-team working and removal of silos and barriers to engagement.
13. **Consultation** – While the council never fails to fulfil the statutory duty to consult, there are opportunities to do this better and in ways which better engage and inspire people. It also needs to take place earlier to input on design, not consult on finished products. This will allow co-design over consultation and give residents more confidence in being able to affect change.
14. **Council spending power** – Revisiting the social value in procurement and how spending can be focused on bringing additional value to purchasing decisions which benefit communities. Looking at grant giving and its impact in the community.
15. **Councillors and democracy** - Working with councillors as representatives and frontline voices of the council and working to ensure better engagement in the democratic process from all communities.

## **How will this be achieved and grown**

16. Existing work will continue as business as usual within the Community enabling team and linked projects such as the Reducing Inequalities Target Area work (RITA) which have been working on community development for a number of years with great success.



17. Within those roles, there will be a focus on support for those groups which formed during covid and how to support those to continue, as well as support for those charities and community groups adversely affected by covid.

18. Linking the wider work around covid recovery, the Citizen Participation Blueprint aims to research and then present principles which, if adopted council wide, will embed understanding of the role the council plays in supporting and developing communities, as well as identify practical next steps which will enhance the work further:

- i. **Phase one - Research and conversations.** Five research work streams with internal and external workshops, 121 interviews and desk top research being undertaken during September and October:
  - (1) Great internal and external practice examples
  - (2) Our internal strengths and why we don't already work this way
  - (3) Communication – when and how to invite people into the conversation
  - (4) Hearing the unheard voices – understanding better engagement
  - (5) Technical tools – what platforms and solutions exist to be utilised
- ii. **Phase two - Draft principles and testing with teams.** Workshopping these draft principles with teams looking at how these could be embedded into their specific working practices and services and whether they are practical in terms of implementation or need any adjustment and development. Also to highlight any recommendations which may need to be made which would allow them to be adopted. Test to be done concurrently with councillors. Understand the criteria for success and what and how to measure in terms of social capital, social network impact, impact of having a sense of community and agency etc.
- iii. **Phase three - Blueprint revision and sign off.** Revise blueprint based on feedback from teams and testing.
  - (1) CLT review and amendments
  - (2) Cabinet review and sign off
- iv. **Phase four - Making it real.** Council wide supported adoption ongoing through 2021. Expand the workshop and facilitation offer more widely.
  - (1) Support SMT to identify opportunities to make significant change and support these adaptations
  - (2) Look at training needs and action for officers
  - (3) Make recommendations in other areas for changes needed to support this way of working
  - (4) Continue to review and update as pilots and changes progress

19. Continuing to work alongside County Council, district and health partners to explore opportunities for better place-based working post-covid based on the successful partnership working during the pandemic. Looking to ensure a reduction in duplication and maximisation of appropriate resources in the right places, especially from commissioned services.

20. Continuing to take part in national and global discussions on good practice such as



NLGN Innovation Network and the Centre for Welfare Reform led Neighbourhood Democracy work, and sharing best practice and innovative ideas to pilot where suitable to the local context.

21. Explore local and national funding opportunities around supporting projects and pilots as many of the recommendations may have a cost attached and current capacity within existing teams given austerity will limit what can be achieved.

### **Key risks and considerations**

22. The approach being taken is a long term one and in many places will need to be looked at as generational change, therefore the time scales need to be committed to upwards of ten years, ideally more and simply ongoing.
23. Austerity and resources meaning we are limited at what we can deliver. Embedding the approach council wide will widen the scope of the council to do more within BAU but there is still a need for officers to be available for the type of support needed for residents to build their confidence and abilities which is currently limited by budgets.
24. The requirement to reduce red tape and formality, but not at the risk of governance internally. This will need to be understood and mitigated where needed and new processes of sharing information (e.g. with contractors for maintenance) need to be reviewed.
25. Lack of council wide buy-in as this is easily undermined if it is not being adopted fully as it will damage trust. If one team does something which is not in-keeping with developing communities, the effect can be to destroy the trust built by another and therefore impact outcomes.
26. Not giving genuine power and control and reverting to conciliatory consultation as an easy tick box. Lack of authenticity diminishes resident trust and belief in the system of change.
27. Need to be willing for approaches not to work and learn from failure. Officers must feel confident that they are able to take managed risks or try something new without fear of reprisal or reprimand.
28. Need to focus on proactive engagement of marginalised communities otherwise the approach may exacerbate inequalities. This involves careful and culturally sensitive working and links to the work already being undertaken on improvements in EIAs.
29. Many good examples of impactful change have been externally or internally funded with significant investment in other places which the council does not have access to. Either consideration needs to be given to making budget available where possible or an acknowledgement that more cannot always be done with no additional resource.
30. Existing inequalities make fully representative engagement more difficult. In areas which have seen multiple interventions or long-term inequalities, including embedded generational issues and culture, can be resistant to new ways of working and engaging with agencies.



31. Navigation of statutory duties in developing new models (e.g. planning requirements and public committees). The council cannot deviate from what it legally has to do and so any new ways of working need to reflect these restrictions.