

## **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **REPORT FROM TASK AND FINISH GROUP – EFFECTIVE DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT**

**LEAD MEMBER:** Councillor Russell Studholme, Chair of the Effective Digital Engagement Task & Finish Group

**LEAD OFFICER:** Sarah Pemberton, Director of Corporate Services and Commercial Strategy

**REPORT AUTHOR:** Rose Blaney, Scrutiny Officer

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

##### **The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:**

- 1) Accept the recommendations made in Section 5 of this report
- 2) Forward the recommendations to the Executive

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This report has been prepared to provide Members with an update of the Effective Digital Engagement Task and Finish Group.

1.2 In 2019, an internal audit review brought about a recommendation to help improve the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's (OSC) interaction with the public via digital engagement. It was recommended that the best way to complete the audit recommendation was to create a Task & Finish Group.

1.3 Due to Covid-19, no progress was made in 2020 and the recommendation was extended until Jan 2022.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In 2019, an internal audit produced the following recommendation (using the internal code ARC&CS\_075):

*Effective digital engagement strategies should be considered to promote the profile and role of scrutiny within the wider public and to encourage the public's participation.*

- 2.2 The Audit recommendations were considered and noted by the OSC Committee in November 2019, and it was agreed that a Task & Finish group would be established to undertake this piece of work.
- 2.3 No further progress was made in 2020, due to Covid-19. A twelve months extension was granted to allow sufficient time to undertake the work, with a new completion date of January 2022.
- 2.4 The Task & Finish Group was established in September 2021 and consisted of Councillors Russell Studholme, Jeanette Forster and Gwynneth Everett.
- 2.5 The group met five times and have now completed their work.

## **3. SCOPE**

- 3.1 The Task & Finish Group agreed three key objectives:
- 1) To review the current method of digital engagement for OSC.
  - 2) To create a web page on the Copeland Borough Council (CBC) website, specifically for OSC issues and contact information to help members of the public interact with the Committee.
  - 3) To create a toolkit to provide further in-depth information on how OSC works and how best to engage with OSC.
- 3.2 The group focused on the digital aspects of engagement with the public, but, noted that there may be some scope for a further review once the web page is up and running on how to engage with the public outside of the digital realm.

- 3.3 The group agreed to work with the Communications Team, who are responsible for the content on the CBC website, to create the most effective web page.
- 3.4 The group noted that the web page would need to be kept under review and updated as necessary in order to remain interactive, which will help with further engagement with the public.
- 3.5 The group also wanted to ensure that the information included within the web page and toolkit was up to date, accurate and easy to understand.

#### **4. Review**

- 4.1 The review began by creating the scope, with the group wanting to be able to answer five key questions:
  - 1) What needs to be included within the website information?
  - 2) What needs to be included within the toolkit?
  - 3) What constitutes as 'effective' digital engagement?
  - 4) Does the content created help Overview and Scrutiny to engage with the public more effectively?
  - 5) Is there enough information available for members of the public to understand how they can engage with Overview and Scrutiny?
- 4.2 Once the scope was agreed, the group began to analyse the draft website page information created by the Scrutiny Officer as a template.
- 4.3 The group met in person to review the draft toolkit in further depth than was possible via a virtual meeting.
- 4.4 The Communications and Engagement Manager was consulted on how best to create the web page and how to keep it up to date and as interactive as the group had wanted to be.
- 4.5 Following the conversations with the Communications and Engagement Manager, it was suggested that the Scrutiny Officer be trained on how to edit the website to give greater control over the contents of the web page.
- 4.6 A full list of the proposed recommendations can be found in paragraph 5.1 below.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 As mentioned above, the group created recommendations for Overview and Scrutiny to consider and then, subject to OSC's agreement, forward onto the Executive. The recommendations are:
- a) To create a web page on the CBC website specifically for OSC, using the information in Appendix A, to help OSC engage more effectively with the public.
  - b) To have as attachments on the web page:
    - OSC Toolkit
    - Call-In and Call for Action information
  - c) To have the Scrutiny Officer trained by the Communications Team to be the administrator for the OSC web page.
  - d) To have a brief review of the information available on the website every six months to ensure content is up to date.
  - e) To work with the Communications Team and use their expertise to ensure that the wording used is beneficial towards effective digital engagement.
- 5.2 The group also wanted to have it noted that the website page was for brief information to encourage engagement and that the toolkit was to provide further, more in-depth information on OSC.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 In conclusion, the Task & Finish group noted that by creating an OSC web page would enable them to have more effective engagement with the public.
- 6.2 The group noted that providing too much information on the website would not help with engagement, but rather may create further disengagement, so a toolkit was created to allow for a place to have more in-depth information should it be required.
- 6.3 That through the recommendations, effective digital engagement may be achieved, and the audit recommendation may be completed.

**Appendices:**

**A.** OSC Web Page Information

**B.** OSC Toolkit

**Background Documents:**

2019 Audit Recommendation

Links under section 8 of Appendix A