



**Resources and Public Realm  
Scrutiny Committee**  
9 February 2022

**Report from the Assistant Chief  
Executive**

**Communications and engagement**

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	None
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Non-Key
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	None
<b>Background Papers:</b>	None
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Rob Mansfield, Head of Communications Lorna Hughes, Head of Strategy and Partnerships

**1.0 Purpose of the Report**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide highlights of the community consultation and engagement mechanisms in place, and to provide summary of the new campaigns model, including current campaigns and ways of working – with a focus on effectiveness and learning.

**2.0 Recommendation(s)**

2.1 The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee notes the consultation and engagement approach undertaken by Brent Council, and notes key success examples.

2.2 The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee notes the new communications and campaigns model, and notes the effectiveness of the new model.

### 3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The community engagement framework for the council has three key aims at its heart:
- To build trust and understanding between the council and the communities of Brent, improving opportunities for all residents to actively participate in the decisions that impact their lives.
  - To develop an approach that creates more opportunities to empower residents on decision making powers to develop and define how services are delivered.
  - To improve the quality and consistency of practice community engagement activities across all part of the Council
- 3.2 The framework has also been developed to address barriers and challenges affecting engagement experienced across the council. These include:
- Whilst some communities are very engaged, others can feel disengaged. There is a recognition that these communities are nuanced and complex and a more flexible model of engagement is needed that grows relationships.
  - Residents sometimes feel unsure about what to expect or what the outcome of their participation was.
  - Residents want to lead design and make decisions, rather than just provide feedback.
- 3.3 The framework outlines our commitment to work in partnership with our communities, our voluntary sector partners and businesses across this rich and diverse borough. Within the framework, we outline the standards and values for what community engagement means, and how we will work hand- in- hand to transform and improve our borough for our communities and residents.
- 3.4 The framework also sets out clear aims and the actions we will prioritise to achieve these aims; through conversations, shared responsibility and collective action. The framework details:
- **Principles** – the guiding values and standards of engagement we offer to residents
  - **Communities** – recognising the communities are complex and nuanced and that they are not mutually exclusive. People will belong to a number of communities; some of place and some of interest or identify and some which are smaller communities within larger ones
  - **Approaches** – guidance on using different methods and techniques
  - **Good practice examples** – an internal online resource available to staff
  - **Advice** – best practice advice will be available from the central team
  - **Staff Network** – to check in with, to share findings and improve quality
  - **Collation of existing ‘User Voices’** to inform council work
- 3.5 The framework provides a toolkit for service areas to enable bespoke development of approaches. There are several aspects to consider when deciding what engagement approach should be taken. These include:
- **Suitability:** choosing the right level of participation for the work in question is important, both in terms of time and effort in planning and implementation but also in ensuring that the outcomes of the engagement meet the needs of the work and that expectations of participants are properly managed.

- **Accessibility:** Regardless of the level of participation that is decided on, it is essential that it is designed and implemented in a way that gives full consideration to any barriers that might exist for residents. Whether this is ensuring that information can be accessed by all or that people have the means or necessary support to effectively contribute.
- **Quality:** All engagement activities should meet a high standard and be fit for purpose, whether that is simply providing residents with information or creating opportunities for full decision making.

3.6 The Community Engagement Framework is currently being developed. Further work will take place over the coming months with members and the community. The final Engagement Framework will be integrated into the refreshed Borough Plan for 2022 onwards.

### Recent engagement

- 3.7 Covid has, over the last 18 months, changed the context and the landscape against which we listen and engage with our residents. This has been reflected in our practice over the past 18 months. This has been particularly reflected in our Black Community Action Plan, Climate Sustainability Strategy, Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Young People strategy.
- 3.8 The main shift in the new Community Engagement Framework is to utilise the existing power, abilities and strengths that exist within our communities. Known as 'Asset Based Community Development' approaches, we are using methods and techniques to engage residents and are seeing better outcomes from this way of working.
- 3.9 By changing our approaches we have increased our access to resident voices that we do not usually hear from. This is also evident in the recent engagement activities delivered to promote the Councils Grant Programmes. A full report will be published in the spring, but early analysis shows significant increase in NCIL applications from BAME groups who have never come forward for Grant funding.
- 3.10 There is also evidence that the recent engagement programme delivered to promote the new 'You Decide CO2GO' Participatory Budgeting trial also attracted smaller community groups new to the Council from BAME backgrounds. The smaller group are responding positively to our asset based community engagement approaches.
- 3.11 To demonstrate how we are working practically with communities a selection of case studies are shown below to demonstrate that the changed approaches are happening across Council departments and further work will take place to ensure all departments take on better engagement approaches that make participating easier for residents.

## **Case Study - The Black Community Action Plan**

The systemic racism and inequalities experienced by Black communities was highlighted following the tragic killing of George Floyd in the US that sparked off protests around the world. The Covid19 pandemic also had a disproportionate impact on Black communities. In June 2020 the council's Leader, Chief Executive, and Deputy Leader met with leaders and young people from Black communities across the borough to listen to their concerns and ideas about what could be done to make lives better, how the Black community could be supported to determine local solutions to improve outcomes, and how we could work together to reduce inequalities in Brent.

This meeting provided the basis for the Brent Black Community Action Plan (BCAP). The BCAP was agreed unanimously by Full Council in July 2020. The overall plan was coproduced with the community, and community engagement and ownership is embedded across activities identified as priorities during the meeting. A Community Reference Group (CRG) was established to coproduce the BCAP and to take a leadership role to self-determine a long term programme of work.

Starting with 10 priority themes, the Reference group selected 3 priorities to focus on during year 1. The Priorities selected were Early Intervention: Children, Young People and Families, Supporting Black Led Organisations, and Building Sustainable Community Capacity. Across the first year, the close working with community leaders led to a new package of activities that have proved to be instrumental in moving forward the ambitions set out at the start of the programme.

Initially, the programme focused on the voices and experiences of local representatives, who spoke on behalf of young people. There has been a strong and continuous view that BCAP must deliver for the next generation. Through this close working, we learned of the importance of having the direct voice of young people in the development of the BCAP. We reached out to young people directly and a new Youth Advisory Group was formed of young people aged under 25 to bring their own voices to BCAP. Working directly with them enables us to make an offer that appeal directly to more young people that they connect with.

### Youth Advisory Group

The Youth Advisory Group (YAG) is made of Black young people aged 14-25 from across Brent. Members applied to join the YAG, after a recruitment exercise across schools and services for young people – targeting those who had never been involved with the council before. The purpose of the YAG is to direct and deliver the BCAP with our support – ensuring that the voice of Black young people is at the heart of the work. The YAG is an example of how important it is for the council to be working with local influencers who are already leaders, with hundreds of contacts across the borough on social media channels and are well connected across the community.

The YAG has taken the lead on areas of work - for example developing commissioning briefs for new services to support young people and delivering key projects, and creating the communications materials that has attracted an

audience that traditionally we do not reach. One example is the 'Pro Vax No Vax' webinar that attracted over 1000 people to engage in a panel discussion to address Covid vaccination hesitancy.

The YAG not only ensures the voice of Black young people is heard, but it also supports young people to develop their skills, tackle inequalities they experience and make a difference for their communities.

### Insight Day

The YAG identified a need to raise awareness about employment prospects and support young people to take the first steps in their career. Working in partnership with the YAG, Newman Catholic College, Ultra Education, West Side Young Leaders, Young Brent Foundation and the Jason Roberts Foundation, an Insight Day was developed.

Over 50 Brent employers from a full range of sectors attended the day, from technology, construction, media, communications, and public services.

The event was co-designed with schools and colleges, and focused on including the real world areas of interest young Black residents have. Over 300 young people attended the day, with increased confidence, skills development and improved networking achieved.

This event has led to a series of bespoke online workshops by Google and a personal development day at the Google offices will take place in spring 2022.

### Picture Palace

The priorities set in the year one delivery plan and the work undertaken with the BCAP steering groups led the community leaders to realise that their combined efforts expressed the need to have a single community facility for the Black African heritage communities.

We have supported local Black led organisations to form a new consortium to take on the lease to Picture Palace. The group uses their experience, expertise and long standing commitment to the borough to ensure that Picture Palace will be a catalyst for change that celebrates the historical and future strengths of the Black community in Brent. The consortium, known as 'Assets For Brent's Communities', will act as the custodians of the building on behalf of the community – not for the individual organisations taking part.

We are supporting Assets for Brent Communities to design and deliver a programme of community engagement to understand how the wider community want to use the building and how the building can be used to enrich their lives. An architect has now been appointed to work alongside them to redesign the building for their use.

Picture Palace has attracted strong interests from groups and organisations who want to use the building for education, arts and culture, creative industries, employment, supplementary education and services for young and older people.

## **Case Study - The Youth Strategy**

From its earliest stages, the Youth Strategy was developed in partnership with local young people to ensure they steered its focus, and that their collective voice was at its heart.

A co-designed engagement and strategy development approach began with targeted sessions with Brent Youth Parliament, Young Brent Foundation Young Ambassadors and Care in Action groups. These sessions gathered initial feedback and tested online engagement approaches to inform the design of the annual Children's Commissioners Takeover Day.

At Takeover Day 2020 30 young people representing six local schools and colleges collaborated in developing a bespoke engagement approach aimed at encouraging their peers to share their views and insights. Through tailored group exercises they created, tested and refined their own engagement questions, and developed vision statements and key messages intended to resonate with other young people.

The main product from Takeover Day was a short, co-produced survey with questions designed to generate responses that would directly shape the strategy's vision, themes and goals. The survey was promoted via the young people who developed it, young leaders and key stakeholders including schools and colleges, PRUs, statutory partners, voluntary and community sector networks – all were tasked with encouraging and supporting responses from the young people they engage or work with to ensure extensive opportunities to contribute.

High-level theming and analysis of all responses were coordinated by a young person on Brent's supported internship programme – a programme for young adults aged between 16 and 24 with special educational needs and disabilities. Working closely with council officers, these themes were refined and draft strategic goals developed.

The final stages of co-development included focussed sessions with YBF Young Ambassadors, Brent Youth Parliament and Brent River College - where the groups reviewed and discussed themed survey responses, providing detailed feedback and new insights for each area - and an aligned, thematic engagement session facilitated by Bang Edutainment.

A vivid and recurring voice throughout co-production of the Youth Strategy is that it must only be the start of young people's involvement - they must continue to influence it through oversight of the delivery plan and opportunities for co-delivery. Many local young people have already invested their time and energy in developing this strategy and are committed to ensuring its successful implementation.

## Case study - the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The Brent Health and Wellbeing Board agreed that in the context of the seismic changes and fundamental issues exposed by the pandemic, a fundamental rewrite of the **Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy** (JHWS) was required. The BHWB also agreed the focus of the JHWS should be a whole systems approach to tackling health inequalities and wider determinants of health inequalities, as exposed and exacerbated by Covid19. The BHWB gave clear instruction that the JHWS must be developed with communities, and that consultation throughout the development process was critical.

Three distinct phases of consultation have taken place from December 2020 to date.

For the first stage of consultation, Healthwatch was commissioned to consult with our most vulnerable, seldom heard communities and those most impacted by health inequalities. The Healthwatch led consultation took place during January and February 2021, with an online and physical survey distributed to target audiences and six virtual community roadshows held. Healthwatch targeted the consultation through their networks – the aim was to speak to those who were most affected by health inequalities, the most vulnerable and those who were seldom heard. We asked them what they believed our priorities should be. The five priorities in the strategy have been developed based on this stage of consultation

During stage two Healthwatch and officers consulted from June to September 2021. Stage two consultees include partners, key external and internal forums, and key community and voluntary sector groups. This stage of the consultation sought to understand stakeholder and key community group opinion of the interim emerging priorities, focused on the following questions:

- Have we interpreted what people told us in stage 1 correctly? Have we missed anything?
- Do the priorities make sense for you/those you care for/your client groups?
- If they are correct, what can we – services and communities – contribute to these priorities?

As a result of this stage, priorities were refined and actions were developed based on community and partner ideas.

Taking into account all the feedback we had received in stages one and two of the consultation, and following on from input from partners, officers produced a draft strategy. This draft strategy formed the basis of stage three. The draft strategy has been made available to all, using a number of avenues:

- Respond digitally via Citizen Lab, the council's online portal
- Respond via physical survey – copies of the strategy and the survey have been made available in libraries.
- Promotion across partners and service user groups, using partners' engagement mechanisms
- Officers have also continued to work with Healthwatch to deliver specific stage three focus groups for key target audiences, including the Brent Disability Forum, children and young people and those affected by poor mental health

Stage three finishes at the end of January 2022. The strategy and delivery plan will be finalised, before it is agreed by the Brent Health and Wellbeing Board.

Communities have been clear that they want ongoing conversation about health and wellbeing, and input in the delivery of the strategy.

### Statutory consultation

- 3.12 All statutory consultations are listed and promoted on the council's consultation platform. Individual consultations will have a communications plan in place that sets out how we will let residents know about the consultation happening and how they can respond.
- 3.13 A new online consultation platform, Citizenlab was introduced in September 2021. This platform was selected due to the increased level of active participation it could offer residents, for example the platform allows residents to post comments on consultations, make suggestions, share their ideas and also put forward topics for consideration by Scrutiny Committees.
- 3.14 Citizenlab requires basic registration with postcode to ensure that only Brent residents are putting forward comments and ideas. The registration form requires name, address and email with further optional questions about personal demographic information. To date there are 1,593 residents, 10 Councillors and 55 staff members registered to use the platform.
- 3.15 Officers have utilised the platform for 46 consultations and have received comments and ideas on all. The platform can be linked to online surveys, and we have promoted 40 surveys since the launch, with 1073 responses submitted.
- 3.16 As a result of consultation, changes are made – for example:
- **The Brent Polling District Review** was live on Citizenlab 24 August to 15 October 2021 and asked residents to provide feedback on proposed polling districts and polling stations via a survey. The survey received 70 responses and as a result of the feedback from residents the proposals were amended to change polling places, particularly in relation to reducing the use and reliance on schools and need to ensure that the new polling districts were served by polling stations that were accessible.
  - **The Roundwood Park Playground** consultation was live on Citizenlab 25 November to 12 December 2021 and asked residents to give feedback on three proposed options for a new playground. The Consultation received 18 comments and 70 votes and as a result of the feedback from residents the council has decided to develop new options to propose to residents in the near future
- 3.17 While we recognise that the online platform will not be accessed by all residents, this is inherent in any online consultation tool. To reduce barriers, officers have met with Citizenlab suppliers and are designing a pilot project to remove the registration process to test if there is an increase in use. Due to capacity and development needs, the pilot will take place in summer 2022. Staff at Brent libraries and the hubs have participated in training sessions on Citizenlab and have been briefed to encourage residents to sign up and use the system to have their say on consultations.



## Purpose, structure, activities and output of the Communications Team

- 3.18 The role of corporate communications is to support positive behaviour change in priority areas, as well as building trust with local communities by protecting and building the council's reputation.
- 3.19 The Communications Strategy 2021-22 guides the work of the corporate communications team. It prioritises support for the core objectives in the Borough Plan and ensures the council's communications resources, including officer time, are targeted in a way that adds the greatest value to the council's objectives and delivers a return on investment based on outcomes.
- 3.20 Our overall stated aim is currently to set the stage for the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and to encourage action 'to ensure a better, fairer and greener future'. The five strategic narratives which focus our activities and which we continue to deliver against are:
- **Creating a fairer and more equal Brent** – aims include ensuring that people "in need" are aware of the host of support services (financial, health & wellbeing, housing) that are available to them, and maximising uptake of the COVID-19 vaccination in Brent.
  - **Together towards zero, and a greener Brent** – aims include informing, persuading, inspiring and empowering local people to take climate action under the five themes of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy.
  - **Key workers, making a difference** – aims include building confidence and trust in the council by showcasing the great work of frontline teams, and how it all contributes to a better Brent, as well as championing community spirit and boosting brilliant local volunteers, groups and organisations.
  - **Living and working in a borough of opportunities** – aims include sustaining support for small local businesses beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and making sure that target audiences for employment and skills programmes are aware of the available support.
  - **Healthy, safe and successful** – aims include making sure target groups know where to go for support for domestic abuse, night time economy businesses do more to make women feel safe, and that young people's contribution to the community and their successes are celebrated.
- 3.21 The team is organised so Communications Account Managers (CAMs) lead on a defined portfolio area. This approach better "joins the dots" for our audiences, making links between service activities, spotting opportunities and risks across the organisation. Each CAM owns one of the strategic narratives, all of which cut across internal directorates. The rationale for this change is that residents are not aware of the distinctions between internal departments, but rather want to understand what the council has to offer them and how it is making positive progress in areas that they can relate to. For example, achieving the council's carbon neutral ambitions by 2030 (*Together Towards Zero*) involves all areas of the council, from environmental services, to housing, regeneration, finance, as well as children and young people.
- 3.22 Day-to-day, members of the corporate communications team:
- Plan and deliver creative communications campaigns, which help meet these objectives.

- Create content for a range of channels, including: websites, social media, newsletters, YourBrent Magazine, digital screens, signage, outdoor advertising.
- Respond to media enquiries from journalists.
- Give advice and guidance to officers on business as usual communications matters and encourage them to self-serve where possible.

3.23 Communications campaigns have delivered a range of positive real-world outcomes over the past 12 months, including a selection below.

- Despite significant challenges, we have played a key role alongside the NHS, local community and other partners in vaccination efforts. To date, 63% of eligible residents have had their first vaccine. A short film tackling vaccine hesitancy in the black community with celebrity Shaun Wallace has been viewed over 310,000 times online and led to wider media coverage, including on BBC Evening News. Over 2,000 people tuned into one vaccine information webinar with black church leaders and Brent public health experts. A further 2,000 people attended three subsequent webinars. We have run five live local radio shows with The Beat, exploring health issues relevant to the black community – all have received positive feedback.
- Our Shop Local campaign, which was launched alongside the BuyBrent app with a big high street presence, has resulted in 50 businesses signing up to sell their wares via the app, over 1,000 downloads, and very positive feedback from local traders.
- The Brent Climate Festival 2021 engaged with more than 2,500 people over the fortnight with a programme which included an interactive Climate Pledge installation in the Civic Centre, a photo exhibition with local faith leaders “Climate Change and My Religion”, as well as the launch of food waste-busting community cookbook “From Brent to Bowl”. The Brent Environmental Network now has 1,800 members who receive practical sustainability tips, inspiration and green news on a monthly basis.
- 6,000 people have signed up for digital skills training via Springboard, following a joint launch with Infosys.
- Promotion of Community Skips held in each ward resulted in 35 tonnes of bulky waste collected over the summer of 2021.
- Our Summer on Your Doorstep campaign helped 2,325 children participate in sport and craft activities, designed to support families receiving free school meals.

*The impact of COVID-19 and the emergency response to drive up vaccine up-take*

3.24 Throughout the pandemic, at critical moments we have flexed our model and redirected resources to focus on delivering important COVID-19 vaccination, testing and other public health messages to local audiences.

3.25 Significant partnership working between the NHS and the council has helped the vaccine rollout through the ongoing waves of doses during 2021. This has included focused work on publicising vaccination sites and targeted engagement to reach communities where uptake has been slow.

3.26 Despite this work that started in January 2021, significant challenges remain today. A year on from when the first vaccine was given, and nearly two years since the pandemic emerged, around 27% of Brent residents have had all three

jobs, compared to a London average of 33%. 37% of Brent residents are yet to have their first job.

3.27 Engagement with communities during 2021 has shown that when it comes to the COVID vaccine there are fears about side effects including on fertility, doubts about effectiveness due to the short timescale for development of the vaccines, general mistrust in authorities including the Government, Council and NHS, as well as apathy and complacency among younger groups.

3.28 Our strategy has included the following:

- **Broad borough-wide.** We continue to complement the national and regional campaigns with timely information and culturally competent communications tailored to our communities, as this is where we can add the most value. We are always building on the insights gathered to-date, around the motives and blocks to getting first, second and booster vaccines.
- **Community outreach** – The community engagement team have actively delivered a programme of outreach into our most affected communities. Using data from Public Health we have targeted residents, community organisations, faith settings and local businesses, sharing leaflets with details of local vaccination centres. This work is providing us with useful feedback that is being collated to inform future materials and approaches to engage the within hyper local areas. Several businesses have expressed interest in taking a more active part in sharing our campaign within the community to improve vaccine up-take.
- **Targeted hyper-local.** From January 2022, targeted work has focused on key audiences who are yet to get their first job, incentivising uptake especially among hesitant communities. Street teams have been deployed in locations where uptake is the lowest, working with clinical teams to line up vaccine provisions, and with staff well briefed to speak to and leaflet passers-by. Leaflets and other collateral have been co-created with those who have a good understanding of our target audience groups and reflect the language of these communities (style, tone, translations). Non-cash incentives are being offered as part of a trial on a first come first served basis to see if this helps motivate some more people to finally come forward for their first job.

3.29 Early feedback indicates:

- Vaccine information is being received at community level
- Vaccine myths via social media appears to have gained credibility amongst some individuals
- Response from local businesses/community groups to promote vaccine uptake is encouraging
- Small number of individuals interviewed remain sceptical of local Authority information (A negative past experience when accessing health services has been reported)
- Negative feedback towards central government regarding rule breaking
- Mistrust of all authorities (including people from countries where they have a lived experience of persecution from authorities)

3.30 **Going forwards** - Our community engagement work is ongoing and we will be maximising our current networks to improve vaccine education. Our voluntary sector partners are working closely with us to organise community events where residents will have the opportunity to participate in a meaningful dialogue, increase access to health professionals to address health inequalities. We will

be working with our identified community champions to break down barriers that may exist as to why some groups are vaccine hesitant. Our outreach team will be circulating a further 10,000 leaflets throughout January and following up and developing new approaches to informing communities on the benefits of vaccine uptake to reduce risk to hospitalisation.

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report, other than the cost of implementing the strategy which is funded from the existing Communications budget.

#### **5.0 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 There is a range of legislation that requires engagement with the community at large as part of the decision making process and many of the council services have specific statutory requirements with respect to consultation. Case law has also enshrined central governments approach that consulting and engaging with local tax payers, stakeholders and the community at large is imperative if meaningful public participation in the decision making process is to take place.

- 5.2 The case of R v Brent Exp. Gunning established the fundamental principles that we are required to comply with when undertaken a consultation:

- a) consultation is undertaken at a formative stage in the proposal process
- b) enough information is provided to allow intelligent consideration of the issue
- c) adequate time is provided for the community to engage with the consultation, and
- d) there needs to be a conscientious consideration of the findings arising out from the consultation

- 5.3 The engagement mechanisms set out in this report enable the council to ensure its maximising its routes for public participation in the consultation process.

#### **6.0 Equality Implications**

- 6.1 The equalities implications of consultation and communications are considered on a case by case basis, to ensure all Brent residents have access to information, advice and guidance, as well as influencing and taking decisions, as outlined in this report.

- 6.2 Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Council has a duty when exercising their functions to have 'due regard' to the need to:

- a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- b) Advance equality of opportunity; and
- c) Foster good relations between those who share a "protected characteristic" and those who do not.

- 6.3 This is the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The 'protected characteristics' are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

**Report sign off:**

***Shazia Hussain***

Assistant Chief Executive