

NNDC Town & Parish Council Engagement Forum

Summary: The Corporate Plan 2019 – 2023 sets out an ambition of improving engagement with the District's Town and Parish Councils. Some forum-style meetings have already been held and it is proposed that the process for engagement should now be formalised and supported by agreed terms of reference.

Options considered:

1. To continue with informal meetings. This presents challenges regarding the monitoring of performance against the Corporate Plan objectives.
2. To cease engagement with the town and parish councils. This is not recommended as there has already been positive feedback from the forums held to date.

Conclusions: The Customer Focus theme of the corporate plan clearly sets out the ambition of improving engagement with local communities, including town and parish councils. A quarterly forum, hosted by NNDC is an effective way of providing a conduit between the two local authority tiers. Agreed terms of reference provides a formal mechanism for engagement and facilitates the monitoring of agreed objectives and outcomes.

Recommendations: **That Cabinet approves the establishment of a quarterly engagement forum with town and parish council representatives**

To approve the terms of reference set out at Appendix A

Reasons for Recommendations: To support engagement with local communities, including town and parish councils, as set out in the Corporate Plan 2019 – 2023.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AS REQUIRED BY LAW

(Papers relied on to write the report, which do not contain exempt information and which are not published elsewhere)

None.

Cabinet Member(s) Cllr T Adams, Leader Cllr L Shires	Ward(s) affected: All
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1. Introduction

1.1 Corporate Plan

The Customer Focus theme of the Council's Corporate Plan 2019 – 2023 sets out the following ambition: 'We want our customers to be at the heart of everything we do and will strive to improve access to our services further through stronger community engagement, developing more formal mechanisms of inviting customer feedback and comment and, where possible and practical, seek to deliver our services at a more local level through strengthening partnerships with local Town and Parish Councils.'

1.2 Previous and existing channels of engagement

There has previously been a newsletter '121' which was issued on a bi-monthly basis to all parish and town councils in the District. This was well received but did not provide the opportunity for two-way engagement. A forum, facilitated and led by the District Council provides a mechanism for both tiers to discuss key issues and consult on items of interest and concern. Four forum-style meetings have been held to date and following positive feedback, it is proposed to formalise these meetings so that outcomes can be monitored.

2. Town and Parish Councils in North Norfolk

2.1 The District has 121 parish and town councils – one of the highest numbers in the country. Sizes range from large councils with employed administrative staff in the seven towns to very small rural parishes with just five councillors and a clerk (who may also support several other parishes). Knowledge and skills reflect this disparity in size and support and it has previously been hard to engage with all 121 town and parish councils in an easily accessible, meaningful way.

2.2 NN Town & Parish Forum (NNTPF)

A forum was established in 2015 by a group of volunteer clerks and councillors to facilitate town and parish councils working together on a wide range of issues. One of the main issues of focus of this forum was a campaign regarding the impact of second homes on local communities. This forum has previously engaged with the District Council on several issues, including second homes, but its membership does not include a representative from every town and parish council in the district.

2.3 The District Council wants to engage with every town and parish council in the District and therefore, to avoid confusion and to ensure a clear separation between the NNTPF and the NNDC forum, it is proposed that the District Council forum is called NNDC Town & Parish Council Engagement Forum and that administrative support, including the setting of the agenda and the scheduling of meetings is provided by the District Council.

2.4 Initial meetings

In 2019, the District Council hosted a forum-style meeting, chaired by the Leader, at the Council Offices and invited clerks from all parish and town councils. This was well attended and feedback from attendees was positive. Since then, three further meetings have been held – all of them have been remote meetings due to the pandemic. This has proved to be a positive development as it enables more people to attend as well as reducing travel, and it is proposed to use this format for future meetings.

- 2.5 To ensure that the Council's objective of 'strengthening partnerships with Town and Parish Councils' is transparent, engaging and accountable, the forum will be underpinned by agreed terms of reference. It will be chaired by the Leader (or a member of Cabinet) and key officers will attend for any agenda items relevant to their service areas.

3. **Corporate Plan Objectives**

3.1 Customer Focus

As mentioned in the introduction, the establishment of a forum to facilitate engagement between the District Council and town and parish councils across North Norfolk, was an objective set out within the Customer Focus theme of the Corporate Plan.

- 3.2 The Council is now looking to formalise the engagement sessions held between 2019 and 2021, by establishing a forum with agreed terms of reference.

- 3.3 This will provide a framework that facilitates engagement with all the parish and town councils across the District.

4. **Financial and Resource Implications**

There are no substantial financial implications of establishing a forum. Meetings will be held remotely and costs, including travel will be minimal. There will be a resource implication for the Democratic Services team but as the forums are held quarterly, it won't be onerous.

5. **Legal Implications**

None. This is not a decision-making body and there will be agreed terms of reference.

6. **Risks**

The main risk is that the forum fails and parish and town councils do not wish to continue to engage. Having terms of reference and scheduled meetings will reduce the risk of this.

7. **Sustainability**

There are no sustainability issues.

8. **Climate / Carbon impact**

By holding meetings of the forum remotely, travel is not required and the carbon impact is considerably reduced.

9. Equality and Diversity

Remote meetings support the Council's Equality & Diversity Policy by facilitating access across all sectors of the community.

10. Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations

Not applicable

11. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Customer Focus theme of the corporate plan clearly sets out the ambition of improving engagement with local communities, including town and parish councils. A quarterly forum, hosted by NNDC is an effective way of providing a conduit between the two local authority tiers. Agreed terms of reference provides a formal mechanism for engagement and facilitates the monitoring of agreed objectives and outcomes.

Recommendations:

- 1. That Cabinet approves the establishment of a quarterly engagement forum with town and parish council representatives**
- 2. To approve the terms of reference set out at Appendix A**