

## **Community Governance Review Sub Committee**

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**Date of Meeting:** 18 February 2019

**Report Title:** Community Governance Review: Communications Plan

**Senior Officer:** Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services and Governance

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### **1. Report Summary**

- 1.1. To inform the Sub-Committee and seek a recommendation to the Constitution Committee for approval of the Community Governance Review Communications and Engagement Plan.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. That the Community Governance Review Sub-Committee
  - 2.1.1. Note the contents of the report.
  - 2.1.2. Recommend that the Constitution Committee:
    - 2.1.2.1. Approve the CGR Communications and Engagement Plan as set out in Appendix A to this report.
    - 2.1.2.2. Authorise the Head of Democratic Services and Governance in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Constitution Committee to make any necessary adjustments to the Communications and Engagement Plan as the review progresses.

### **3. Reason for Recommendations**

- 3.1. To set out a comprehensive and co-ordinated plan for communications and engagement around Cheshire East's Community Governance Review.

### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. None. Not having a coordinated communications approach is not an option.

## **5. Background**

- 5.1. Cheshire East Council (CEC) is conducting a review of town and parish council governance arrangements across Cheshire East; this to be mainly implemented after the all-out elections in May 2019.
- 5.2. Cheshire East has 186 town and parish council wards in 135 town and parish councils covering the whole borough. CEC is responsible for electoral and governance arrangements within the borough including: town and parish boundaries; numbers of town and parish councillors; and Arrangements for wards and the meetings of groups of parish councils.
- 5.3. It is good practice to review community governance every 10-15 years. CEC was created in 2009 and has yet to hold a full review of town and parish council governance.
- 5.4. CEC is aware of a small number of parish council governance-related issues, together with other matters which have arisen, for example, in connection with recent and proposed developments. The review will deal with these in borough-wide, coordinated way, so as to ensure consistency of approach and prevent the risks associated with having a piecemeal, non-holistic, uncoordinated, reactive approach, which would place a greater strain on resources – taking longer to deliver and at an increased cost to tax payers
- 5.5. CEC will consult on the scope of the review, topics and proposals that can be included. CEC will then consult on proposals. CEC hopes to conclude the review well before the May 2023 local elections.
- 5.6. In order to carry out this review effectively and in line with government guidance and legislation, it is vital that effective and extensive communications activity promotes participation in the consultations by residents and other key stakeholders.
- 5.7. Communications publicity and engagement will inform stakeholders about the CGR process, the key milestones and the expected timeline to completion and adoption.
- 5.8. The aim is to build understanding of the CGR process, drive public engagement, protect and enhance the reputation of the council and reinforce the key messages – especially the timescale for implementation of any changes, a review is normal good practice, that any proposed changes will be consulted on fully and all views and comments will be taken into consideration before any final decisions.

## **6. Implications of the Recommendations**

### **Legal Implications**

6.1.1. If the CGR consultations are not well publicised, promoted and facilitated across all stakeholders the council runs the risk that the review will be challenged over the level of consultation and may face a formal judicial review.

6.1.2. Publicity and communications must be compliant with local government guidance re the pre-election 'purdah' period – between 14 March and 10pm on polling day on 2 May 2019 – and not (nor be perceived to) promote any party or candidate in the local elections.

### **6.2. Finance Implications**

6.2.1. No direct implications

### **6.3. Policy Implications**

6.3.1. There are no direct policy implications arising from this report.

### **6.4. Equality Implications**

6.4.1. There are no direct equality implications arising from this report.

### **6.5. Human Resources Implications**

6.5.1. The communications plan will be carried out using existing staffing resources.

### **6.6. Risk Management Implications**

6.6.1. The communication of, and promotion/publicity, around the council's holistic CGR approach will help avoid the risk associated with carrying out a review without adequate consultation – which could potentially lead to legal challenge/judicial review.

### **6.7. Rural Communities Implications**

6.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities arising from this report, other than the key need to keep rural communities fully informed of the process and to encourage their participation.

## **6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

6.8.1. There are no direct implications for children and young people arising from this report.

## **6.9. Public Health Implications**

6.9.1. There are no direct implications for public health arising from this report.

## **7. Ward Members Affected**

7.1. All ward Members' wards will be affected in that the consultations around CGR will be communicated across all wards and will seek to engage all stakeholders, including Members.

## **8. Consultation & Engagement**

8.1. This is dealt with in the main body of the report.

## **9. Access to Information/Contact Information**

9.1. The Community Governance Review Communications and Engagement Plan is attached as Appendix A.

9.2. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Tim Oliver

Job Title: Senior Media Relations Officer

Email: [tim.oliver@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:tim.oliver@cheshireeast.gov.uk)