

Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council

Personal Details:

Name:

[REDACTED]

E-mail:

[REDACTED]

Postcode:

[REDACTED]

Organisation Name:

Comment text:

Obviously the expansion North to the A5 boundary needs to be mirrored in representation at all levels. It will also change the local debate, with greater emphasis being put on the pros and cons of the environmental impacts of the Logistics Golden Triangle and the emerging opportunities at MIRA. An increase in councillors may be necessary, although it is unlikely that small-minded local politicians will be up to the task. There would be greater benefit in working through ad hoc issue-based participatory democracy, including post-COVID E-democracy fora. The assumption that geography encourages coherence is faulty. At the different levels of day-to-day lived experience, for example, the issue of the Coventry overspill in the South West (Exhall) has nothing in common with, say, the Midlands Connect corridor linking the M6 to the M1 (Weddington). New electoral arrangements are an opportunity to "encourage impactful participation" [see: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FP_20200817_democracy_covid_belin_demaio.pdf]. There's a lot of good thinking in the LGA's recent 'COVID-19 communications: Community engagement and local democracy' [attached] that could be built on, and a bit of joined-up thinking with this paper would have helped shift your request for comment on new council ward boundaries to something more interesting and meaningful than a 'yet more men in suits' numbers game.

Uploaded Documents:

https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/download_document?file=draft%2F1662016968_COVID-19+communications+%7C+LGA.pdf

[Home](#)[\[1\]](#)> [Our support \[1\]](#) > [Guidance and resources \[1\]](#)

COVID-19 communications: Community engagement and local democracy

During the COVID-19 crisis, local authorities have engaged with their communities at an unprecedented level and pace. Whether it is recruiting volunteers to support the shielded, helping local communities respond to the challenges or engaging with business about decisions on opening.

The impact of this engagement has been overwhelmingly positive, increasing trust in local authorities as trust in other institutions continues to decline - evidenced by **the most recent LGA survey** [\[https://www.local.gov.uk/polling-resident-satisfaction-councils-june-2020\]](https://www.local.gov.uk/polling-resident-satisfaction-councils-june-2020).

A window of opportunity now arises for councils to capitalise on this revitalised relationship.

There will be a number of issues arising from the profound structural changes to the way our local areas work both in the short, medium and longer term. In this section, we explore the future of community engagement as we move towards and plan for recovery, across five areas:

1. Servicing delivery
2. Shaping public realm
3. Behaviour change
4. Levels of service provision and budgets
5. Engaging and sustaining volunteers

Community engagement

Service delivery

The changes to the way services are delivered will require early engagement with residents and existing service users to identify expectations, new needs and new behaviours and adapt accordingly.

This means:

- putting greater emphasis on social listening
- surveying customers/citizens online
- conducting online focus groups
- creating materials including infographics, data visualisations and video to prompt community debates

COVID-19 communications

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COVID-19 communications: Prioritisation

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COVID-19 communications: Insight

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- using community facebook groups for discussion
- hosting live Q&A sessions online with councillors
- hosting online community conferences
- holding specific webinars with service users to capture ideas for re-imagining service flows and delivery
- allowing users to give views by generating online content (text, visuals, photos and videos)
- considering chat tools

But also giving consideration to those who may be digitally excluded. There are opportunities to:

- engage via local media in articles, paid advertising, phone ins and question times
- use empty shop windows for exhibitions
- conduct socially distanced outdoor engagement events
- deliver print products and surveys to households
- conduct tele surveys
- work with community groups, parish and town councils to reach communities
- host audio conferences

Build an engagement framework which is effective at reaching communities and capturing views. Think about using recording online audio, chat and video. Make sure you have conducted an equality impact assessment on the engagement framework to ensure you are reaching all your communities and not just the usual suspects.

Place-shaping and the public realm

There is an opportunity to discuss with communities a new vision of how both indoor and outdoor spaces work.

There have been profound impacts on the way people are working and travelling. Many local authorities have used the reduction in car movements to develop temporary cycle and walking routes.

The need for social distancing in public and outdoor spaces for exercise, shopping and eating out may also have significant impact on the way public realm is used, how we rethink existing public spaces and how we design public realm for the future.

There is an opportunity to have a more substantive visioning exercise on the way we use public space and realm. This may be aligned to Local Plan engagement or undertaken as a standalone exercise.

Many of the techniques discussed above will be relevant, but for public realm it will also be useful to:

- conduct observational studies of how people are using spaces
- create video from user point of view on navigating spaces
- building three dimensional models of how spaces might operate
- use interactive mapping and tools which allow participants to build spaces -

COVID-19 communications: Developing your strategy internally

[\[/our-support/leadership-workforce-and-communications/comms-hub-communications-support/covid-19\]](#)

COVID-19 communications: Living with COVID-19: local clusters and outbreak control

[\[/our-support/leadership-workforce-and-communications/comms-hub-communications-support/covid-19-0\]](#)

COVID-19 communications: Working with partners

[\[/our-support/guidance-and-resources/comms-hub-communications-support/covid-19-communications/covid-8\]](#)

COVID-19 communications: place leadership

[\[/our-support/guidance-and-resources/comms-hub-communications-support/covid-19-communications/covid-3\]](#)

taking planning for real into virtual worlds

- consider using gaming products to allow people to build spaces such as Minecraft

Exeter City Futures [<https://www.exetercityfutures.com>] (partnership heavily supported by Exeter City Council) - online summits Retail in a post Covid city and transport and travel

Green restart emergency virtual roundtable on transport and travel [<https://www.exetercityfutures.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ECF-Emergency-A-Green-Restart-Report-FINAL.pdf>]

Behaviour change

There are also new opportunities to engage with citizens on changing behaviours. Evidence suggests that periods of major change are key moments when behaviours unfreeze and there is a chance to create positive, long lasting change.

One example is fly tipping. Large numbers of people working and exercising at home has led to a rise in reports of dumped waste and greater ownership of public realm. A behaviour change campaign aligned to a customer focused end to end review of the waste process could make significant impact in an area where it has been hard to shift behaviours.

Another example would be the chance to capitalise on the move away from cash. Many councils have had residual activities where cash payments were still undertaken. Hygiene concerns over handling cash can be used as an opportunity to make a permanent move to card payments, accepting there will need to be arrangements for those without credit/debit cards such as contactless pre-payment cards.

The move to online ticketing, online payment and booking of slots for many more services may help complete the shift to online transactions that many authorities have been working on. This allows better control of flows and arguably improved customer delivery opportunities. Work to manage municipal waste sites, bulky waste deliveries, local authority run visitor attractions provides models for the future.

The EAST social marketing model

[https://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT-Publication-EAST_FA_WEB.pdf] is a useful tool in working with staff and customers to rebuild systems and processes in a way which delivers long lasting behavioural change.

Service provision and budgets

Some local authority services may not be provided in the short to medium term such as events, libraries, indoor leisure facilities or business training.

At the same time councils will have lost revenue due to a fall in income from rents, business rates and parking charges so there will be a need to engage with citizens about the shape of services to come and the willingness to pay.

COVID-19 communications: Internal communications

[[our-support/guidance-and-resources/comms-hub-communications-support/covid-19-communications/covid-1](#)]

COVID-19 communications: Channels

[[our-support/guidance-and-resources/comms-hub-communications-support/covid-19-communications/covid-2](#)]

Herefordshire Council - planning for recovery

[[case-studies/herefordshire-council-planning-recovery](#)]

COVID-19 communications: Useful links

[[our-support/guidance-and-resources/comms-hub-communications-support/covid-19-communications/covid-4](#)]

This will require a deeper and longer engagement than usually occurs on a single year budget. Ensuring engagement in budget discussion moves beyond the usual suspects is essential to achieving public consensus on spending decisions.

People need to start from the same level of knowledge in budget consultations so preparing materials which provide a background to the services the authority provides, how much it spends and on what, where it gets its income from is important.

Explaining the pressures the local authority is under so that people have a context for the views they are asked to give is also important. This means explaining what adult social care does and the demographics of the community served - for instance in some areas there are high numbers of older people.

For children's services pressures may arise from high levels of poverty in an area putting extreme pressure on families and greater support being needed. Transport costs may be higher in authorities with large rural areas because subsidies on public transport have to be greater due to rural sparsity and there are more miles of road to maintain. In addition to the usual narratives there will need to be one which is specific to each authority which describes the impacts of COVID-19 on finances.

Communities and individuals often find it easier to talk about which services are most important to them or have higher priority but they do want to know the consequences of de-prioritising some services. Equally, the scale of the figures involved in local authority spending can be difficult for some people to engage with and it can be easier to use allocation of points where points are proxies for a financial sum.

Budget consultations can use a mix of online and offline methods:

- A series of videos/animations to explain services, spending and pressures alongside written information.
- Interactive models which show the impact on council tax of various spending decisions are helpful
- Use of webinars with Q&A can help people understand topics in more detail before they make decisions
- Closed moderated discussion groups on Facebook or through MS Teams can help people to explore their views
- Facebook lives with Council Leaders or Elected Mayors can allow people to ask questions directly
- Community discussions hosted online by neutral third parties where officers and members take part can also be helpful in identifying views from specific communities whether that be parents via MumsNet, women via GossipGirls or BAME
- Gameification can also be used to provide "sticky" content where people interact with different spending options and see the resulting changes in service provision
- Online surveys can be used to get views on priorities but it is worth collecting geo demographics to ensure you are aware of biases

Key to any successful budget consultation is being clear from the outset how much weight community views will have as opposed to other consultees such as staff, members, partners and businesses and a clear timeline for decisions to be made.

Engaging and sustaining volunteers

Many councils in the early stages of the crisis were highly successful in attracting volunteers to support vulnerable people in their communities. Some were overwhelmed with far more volunteers than they had opportunities for. Although many may have volunteered as they were on furlough there is an opportunity to build on this community spirit going forward.

Councils can develop and nurture this volunteer army by:

- checking volunteers sign up included contact beyond the crisis (GDPR) and if not contacting and asking people if they want to remain on volunteer register
- regular emails updating them
- creating a volunteer group on Facebook
- working with local VCS to match volunteers to local opportunities
- creating a volunteer toolkit for leading activities in their communities such as beach cleans, litter picks, taking over and maintaining verges/open spaces, walking/cycling/running groups
- connecting volunteers to existing community groups
- connecting volunteers with elected members

Local democracy

Councillors have been at the forefront of helping their communities organise during COVID-19 and there have been lots of examples of visible leadership from Council Leaders, Portfolio Holders and Elected Mayors. For many, it has allowed them to gain confidence in taking on a community leadership role, that may have been missing before.

There has been great visibility on social media with many chief executives and Leaders championing the work of their staff and local government on Twitter, elected Mayors doing Facebook lives and Directors responsible for supporting businesss actively explaining financial schemes on LinkedIn.

The move to virtual council meetings and greater use of webcasting or using social live facilities has provided greater opportunities for public involvement.

Organisations need to look at how they can capitalise on this enhanced digital democratisation, options include:

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- Regular live Q&A sessions on social platforms fronted by both politician and officers but supported by communications staff
- Webinars via Zoom, MS teams or social media events where service directors and portfolio holders can talk to communities of interest about key services
- Developing collaborative spaces where councillors and constituents can discuss ward issues
- Opportunities for micro polls on topics of interest

Elections were postponed for a year for councils, police and crime commissioners and elected mayors so there is also a need to address any concerns over governance arrangements and reassurance that elections will take place in 2021.