

Committee(s): Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub-Committee	Dated: 24 April 2024
Subject: Resident Engagement Update	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	Diverse Engaged Communities, Providing Excellent Services
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N/A
Report of: Executive Director of Corporate Communications and External Affairs	For Information
Report author: Mark Gettleson, Head of Campaigns and Community Engagement Grace Sagar-Shotbolt, Resident Campaigns and Communications Manager	

Summary

This report provides an overview of recent progress made and next steps in our resident engagement activity. The appointment of the new Resident Campaigns and Communications Manager in October 2023 provided a focal point for this area of activity across the organisation. They have delivered key events, including two City Question Times and a residents’ social event, and have worked with key external and internal stakeholders to develop a resident engagement strategy.

In this work, it is recognised that the “Resident Reset” is about far more than communications and touches every part of our organisation and the way in which it involves and delivers services within the Square Mile. This said, improving communications – whether to better consult and listen, involve residents in interesting activities and events, and foster a sense of community – will assist with every aspect of a wider reset.

The report outlines the stakeholder engagement work undertaken across the organisation, events, communications and the need for a distinct City of London resident offer.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background: Wider communications and organisation transformation

1. This report sits in the context of a wider communications and organisational transformation programme, including looking at how we communicate with all our audiences and stakeholders. The current 12-month programme, funded through the Policy Initiatives Fund, represents a bridge to a new permanent model of improved resident communications and engagement. The relationship between the communications and engagement with residents being undertaken outside of the communications team, including by Housing, the Department of Children and Community Services (DCCS), Destination City and others will need to be defined and better tied into a fully joined up approach.
2. Key to this will be the work being undertaken by the IT Directorate to develop a single organisational CRM, able to track all the relationships we hold across departments. All our engagement work, including with our resident community, continues to be held back by the lack of a single view of who is taking part in events and activities, responding to communications and sharing concerns. Above all, without such information, it's difficult to identify where we have residents where engagement is weaker.

Stakeholder meetings

3. In their first five months in post, the new Resident Campaigns and Communications Manager has had numerous conversations with key internal and external stakeholders – including elected members, officers across departments, residents' association representatives and community partners to better understand how they are engaging with residents, where improvements could be made and how this work can be best enabled by the City Corporation.

a) **Elected Members.** There is overwhelming enthusiasm from elected members to improve our engagement with their resident constituents – and to be more directly involved in that engagement. Wards such as Cripplegate and Aldersgate have begun a programme of regular public ward meetings and advice surgeries, with direct officer support for such activities proving beneficial. We should make it clear to members how we can support them in this kind of work, sharing relationships and insight wherever possible, in a way that works beyond residential wards. In particular, members have been keen to ensure a joined-up approach to the way in which different departments and officers communicate with residents, especially around specific projects such as repairs, leisure, Destination City and planning, all of which sit in separate teams.

b) **Residents Associations.** The Resident Campaigns and Communications Manager has met with Golden Lane Estate RA, Middlesex Street RA, Petticoat

Square Leaseholders' Association and Queens Quay RA. Meetings are being set with both the Barbican Association and Tudor Rose Court. There was overall positive feedback on the need for more communications and better engagement with residents, including through a new physical newsletter, improved email bulletin and broader events programme. All the associations spoken to were happy to use their channels to share relevant information we provide with their residents. There was a marked difference however between private housing (Queens Quay) and those where we are the landlord. While the former had few concerns relating to the City Corporation, those on Middlesex Street in particular felt that without improvements in our service delivery as landlords, improvement in our communications would have limited impact. More broadly, Residents Associations want us to show that we value the “residential City” as much as the “business City”, and that we value all residents equally – while recognising the need for different approaches within some audiences, it is crucial that we express and act on those values in everything we do.

c) **City Corporation Departments and Institutions.** All parts of our organisation with a remit within the Square Mile have a need to engage with our resident community, though most do so in isolation in a way that leads to duplication and less joined-up customer experience. As previously outlined, some of this work, especially in DCCS, is direct service provision, though even there communications plays a key role. We have increased interdepartmental co-ordination and are moving towards a more cohesive approach, with teams across the organisation – including Destination City and Planning – working with the Resident Campaigns and Communications Manager to improve their events and consultations. Content has been provided to the Housing Team to be shared in their emails and social media, though how this work ties in with that of the central Communications team will be looked at as part of the wider communications transformation review. We have also met with institutions such as the Barbican Centre, for whom resident engagement around their renewal programme will be a major priority, to ensure co-ordination. Removing these institutional silos will take time, but are key to an approached centred on providing our residents with the information and support they need in a timely and useful manner.

d) **Business Improvement Districts.** The Resident Campaigns and Communications Manager has so far met with two Business Improvement Districts (BIDs): Culture Mile and Fleet Street Quarter. While BIDs explicitly exist to serve their business levy-payers, both placed importance on engaging their resident community. Culture Mile BID, in particular, is home to the Barbican, Golden Lane and residential areas of Farringdon Within and places particular importance on resident engagement. They have set up a Community Fund, offering grants to local projects, and have begun to build relationships with key stakeholders in the resident community. They are keen to work with us

to develop this further and it will be important for us to jointly articulate how BIDs and City Corporation engagement fit together.

City Question Time

4. Regular City Question Time events are a key way in which the organisation is delivering on the Policy Chairman's pledge to make himself more regularly accessible and available to residents. These have evolved from the City-wide Resident Meetings, and are designed to allow maximum time for questions rather than presentations – and being member rather than officer-led gives the greatest opportunity to those attending to hold their representatives to account.
5. An important part of the remit of the Resident Campaigns and Communications Manager is to deliver these events, and we have held two successfully since their arrival. In December 2023 at the Old Bailey and in January 2024 at Guildhall – they received 303 and 182 registrations respectively, showing significant interest in this kind of activity. Residents were invited through paid leafleting, digital communications and through members' own channels. As well as introducing more residents to City Question Time, this has also helped us to build up a database of resident contacts which we can use to spread the word about other relevant events and initiatives.
6. Feedback from attendees shows that 70% rated these events as 'excellent' or 'good', with 60% agreeing that the events met their expectations. 100% of respondents said that they are likely to attend future City Question Time or similar events.
7. Future City Question Time events are planned for 4 June in the east of the City and 22 October in the Barbican area. The Resident Campaigns and Communications Manager has worked with the Office of the Policy Chairman to develop a project plan so that we can organise these events jointly.

A wider events programme

8. While City Question Time events continue to be well-attended, these events are likely to always attract those who are already the most engaged. Generally speaking, the audience for this event is very similar on each occasion. This is also true of the Citizens Forums, set up by Brendan Barns in January in his capacity as the resident representative on the City Envoy Network run by Destination City. We have assisted in promoting these events, which alongside ward events, City Question Time and ad-hoc departmental consultations form a crowded field of relatively similar forms of engagement that need bringing together in a coherent way. This will require significant work across teams.

9. Overall, if we are to expand the range of residents we effectively engage, we must also offer a wider range of events and activities for them to attend – with objectives beyond holding their local representatives to account, including socialising and networking with other residents, entertainment and education.
10. Recognising this, we created a “Festive Party” element to the December City Question Time event, giving attendees an opportunity to meet each other and elected members more informally following the event, with a live band and refreshments. 48 people signed up for the party element only. It was felt by some however that mixing a formal and informal event limited the effectiveness of the latter, and it is worth trying purely social events in the future. The Resident Campaigns and Communications Manager plans to organise a late summer party and another festive celebration later this year.

City Belonging Project and City events

11. The City Belonging Project is a new initiative designed to bring together the staff networks and D&I and HR leaders of City firms to create a greater sense of community among the transient worker population of the Square Mile. While still in its early stages, the programme has already met with significant success, putting on a number of interesting events for particular communities.
12. Residents have been included in some City Belonging Project events on an ad-hoc basis, such as “Accessibility in the City” and a recent Holocaust survivor event at St Lawrence Jewry. However, a more strategic approach is needed in the longer term. While recognising the unique needs of City workers, including residents within aspects of this programme will help foster a sense of community and prove an important vehicle of bridging the divide between the working and residential City. The “Finding Jewish Cripplegate” group, a heritage project which has involved City residents, workers and clergy, likely presents a model for this kind of activity – and members of the group were invited to the City’s Chanukah reception in December.
13. While most local authorities have resident networks for particular communities, our small residential population means these are rarer (exceptions being an active Parents and Carers network and Access Group). This makes it more difficult for our organisation, and partners such as the City Police, to know which residents to invite to participate in events and consultations relevant to those communities. In order to address this, we should survey our residents to identify individuals who might be interested in particular community events and help networks among our resident community to form. We should ensure that, once identified, more residents are able to attend more of our Guildhall community events on an equal basis to business figures.

Resident communications

14. Through resident engagement activities, signups to the CityResident email newsletter have grown incrementally over recent months. We have also been using the estate-specific emails overseen by the Housing team to share relevant information and events. However, as part of the communications transformation programme, this work will need to be better joined together, ensuring that every resident receives timely, engaging and relevant communications on an equal basis. The CRM programme will enable a lot of this work, allowing the organisation to see exactly where it lacks an email address for residents at a particular property.
15. In the absence of a holistic email list, and following feedback from elected members, it was felt important to reintroduce a regular physical newsletter for our resident community. This newsletter will be A3, with four localised versions for clusters of wards in different parts of the City, allowing for relevant updates and information from members. We are currently developing a brief for this newsletter and speaking with graphic designers with a plan to send the first edition of the new publication in June 2024. This will be delivered through a door-to-door delivery service at a significantly lower cost than previous publications.
16. While not purely a resident engagement exercise, members were also asked to contribute to a leaflet insert in the wardmote letter, which went to both residents and workers on the Ward List. This exercise was extremely cost-effective, due to the fact the communication needed to be sent anyway, and should be repeated in future non-election years.

Our Resident 'Offer'

17. The City Corporation has no centrally-defined resident "offer" of the benefits people who live in the City receive from our organisation. The comparatively small size of our resident community and strong relationships with local institutions make this more achievable. We want to ensure that our residents are given privileged status wherever possible and feel direct benefits of living in a predominantly business City. Each public-facing team and institution should be asked to define this offer as it affects their work.
18. While only one aspect of this work, we are in the process of developing a programme of discounts and free access at cultural institutions in and around the City, and in local retail, hospitality and leisure venues. We are working with our colleagues across the City Corporation and the BIDs to secure these agreements. An early example of this will be two-for-one tickets to the Tower of London, which we will be launching in early Spring on an initial three-month trial period. We plan for a range of offers to be ready in time for the June resident newsletter.

19. Other local authorities have a physical or digital residents' card, giving discounts and preferred access. We will investigate a similar system in the future, depending on the infrastructure available to support such an initiative.

Consultation

20. There is clear support from members and officers across departments for a more effective and staged approach to consultation with our Square Mile communities – to avoid respondent fatigue or duplication. While better communications and engagement assists significantly with promoting individual consultations, there is a significant body of work to be done in horizon-scanning and bringing consultations together in a comprehensive and intelligible way, so far as compliance allows. This work will be looked at as part of the communications transformation programme and affects multiple departments.

Long-term funding

21. This work has been funded through the Policy Initiatives Fund: £150,000 over a 12-month period, of which £72,350 has funded one Resident Campaigns and Communications Manager for one year on a fixed term contract, with the remaining £77,650 funding City Question Time and other events and communications activity.
22. Engagement with our resident community is however core business for the organisation and will need to be funded on a long-term basis, as part of the communications transformation programme. Through this work, the relationship between this central activity and resident engagement and communications work being undertaken in other parts of the organisation will need to be defined and better co-ordinated with the work of the Communications Team.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

23. Strategic implications – Improving engagement with our resident community helps contribute to Corporate Plan objectives Diverse Engaged Communities and Providing Excellent Services.
24. Financial implications – None.
25. Resource implications – Additional support may be called upon from officers across the organisation with a resident-facing remit to assist with the activities outlined in this report.

26. Legal implications – Information collected on City residents as part of an engagement must be stored securely and only shared within the organisation in a way that is compliant with the GDPR and other data protection legislation.
27. Risk implications – Failing to better engage with our residents risks making our consultations and communications less meaningful and impactful, leading us to be less effective and open to criticism in the way we operate as an organisation.
28. Equalities implications – By engaging more of our residents in our activities on a fair and equal basis, especially those not currently involved in our consultations and decision-making processes, the proposals contained in this report help to support our equalities duties and aspirations.
29. Climate implications – None.
30. Security implications – Any information held on residents as part of this programme must be stored safely.

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