



Dacorum Borough Council

Assurance Review of Community Engagement


October 2024

Final



Executive Summary

OVERALL ASSESSMENT



ASSURANCE OVER KEY STRATEGIC RISK / OBJECTIVE

Reputational Damage.

SCOPE

The Audit reviewed the council's approach to community engagement, involvement, and experience. This included an assessment of established procedures, cultural aspects and communication strategies supporting meaningful engagement within the community.

KEY STRATEGIC FINDINGS

The systems of Internal Control relating to Community Engagement were considered to be generally adequate and operating effectively but some improvements are required. The recommendations made do not fully inform the assurance level given since management have already identified the following:

- The Community Strategy Action Plan and Dacorum Borough Council Toolkit are due to be updated in quarter 4 of the 24/25 Financial Year.
- A service restructure is due to be undertaken during the 2024/25 Financial year. The new proposed structure has been agreed by the Strategic Senior Leadership Team.

Additional improvements highlighted as part of the recommendations were:

- Consultation Checklist/Consultation briefs to be completed as per the Toolkit requirement.
- An overall Community Engagement report to be presented to the Strategic Senior Leadership Team.
- KPI relating to Community Engagement to be formulated/developed.

GOOD PRACTICE IDENTIFIED

The consultation toolkit was developed with the Local Government Association Guide: New Conversations, LGA Guide to Engagement.

ACTION POINTS

Urgent	Important	Routine	Operational
0	0	3	0

Assurance - Key Findings and Management Action Plan (MAP)

Rec.	Risk Area	Finding	Recommendation	Priority	Management Comments	Implementation Timetable (dd/mm/yy)	Responsible Officer (Job Title)
1	Directed	<p>The Head of Communications and Engagement advised that there are two types of Consultation (Statutory and Non - Statutory). For Statutory Consultations a Consultation Brief should be completed and Non - Statutory Consultation a Consultation Checklist should be completed however these are not usually completed. Two Consultations were selected for review as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking Consultation (Non - Statutory). • Local Plan (Statutory Consultation). <p>It was noted that no Consultation Brief/Consultation Checklist had been completed for the Parking Consultation or the Local Plan.</p>	<p>Consultation Checklist / Consultation briefs to be completed as per the Toolkit requirement.</p>	3	<p>Ensure all consultation requests complete the Consultation Brief and/or Checklist before any work commences.</p>	01/11/24	<p>Kelvin Soley, Head of Communications and Engagement</p>
2	Delivery	<p>The Head of Communications and Engagement advised that an overall Community Engagement report is currently not being presented to the Strategic Senior Leadership Team and it may be useful for a report of all consultation to be presented, possibly quarterly or six monthly.</p>	<p>An overall Community Engagement report to be presented to the Strategic Senior Leadership Team representing all current consultations, possibly quarterly or six monthly.</p>	3	<p>Six monthly reports to be implemented from Q1 2025/26.</p>	01/04/25	<p>Kelvin Soley, Head of Communications and Engagement</p>
3	Delivery	<p>The Head of Communications and Engagement advised that no KPIs applicable in relation to Community Engagement are in place.</p>	<p>KPI relating to Community Engagement to be formulated/developed.</p>	3	<p>Agreed.</p>	01/04/25	<p>Kelvin Soley, Head of Communications and Engagement</p>

ADVISORY NOTE

Operational Effectiveness Matters need to be considered as part of management review of procedures.

Operational - Effectiveness Matter (OEM) Action Plan

Ref	Risk Area	Finding	Suggested Action	Management Comments
No operational effectiveness matters were identified.				

ADVISORY NOTE

Operational Effectiveness Matters need to be considered as part of management review of procedures.

Findings



Directed Risk:

Failure to properly direct the service to ensure compliance with the requirements of the organisation.

Ref	Expected Key Risk Mitigation	Effectiveness of arrangements	Cross Reference to MAP	Cross Reference to OEM
GF	Governance Framework There is a documented process instruction which accords with the relevant regulatory guidance, Financial Instructions and Scheme of Delegation.	Partially in place	-	-
RM	Risk Mitigation The documented process aligns with the mitigating arrangements set out in the corporate risk register.	Partially in place	-	-
C	Compliance Compliance with statutory, regulatory and policy requirements is demonstrated, with action taken in cases of identified non-compliance.	Partially in place	1	-

Other Findings



The Head of Communications and Engagement confirmed the following Policies/Procedures relating to Community Engagement.

1) The Communications Strategy Action Plan 2022-2025 sets out the overarching Communications Strategy for Dacorum Borough Council (DBC). The strategy provides an overview of the role of the communications department, objectives for the 3-year period and a team structure.

2) DBC Consultation Toolkit. The main aspects outlined as part of the toolkit were as follows:

- Aim and objectives of your Consultation.
- The level and method of consultation needed.
- Who to consult/stakeholders.
- Planning and doing the consultation.
- Using the results.

3) Let's Talk Dacorum User Guide. The main aspects outlined as part of the guide were as follows:

- Introduction.
- Administrators.
- Planning and Hub Creation.
- Aspects relating to the survey.
- Survey Analysis.

In addition, it was noted that the Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan and Dacorum Borough Council Toolkit are due to be updated in quarter 4 of the 2024/25 Financial Year. Therefore, no recommendation was made in relation to the updating of the Community Strategy Action Plan and Dacorum Borough Council Consultation Toolkit.

Other Findings



The Team structure as of June 2024 provides clear segregation into two areas, namely Campaigns, Filming and Events alongside Digital Communications and Engagement. Each area is further broken down into the senior management team and key programmes the area is responsible for. The Council Team structure details five team members by role and name of current staff member, as well as what key programmes each area covers, providing clear segregation of duties and responsibilities.

However, a service restructure is due to be undertaken during the 2024/25 Financial year. The new proposed structure has been agreed by the Strategic Senior Leadership Team.



The Head of Communications and Engagement advised that risk relating to Community Engagement will be identified and mitigated in the New Community Engagement Strategy, Action Plan and Toolkit to be developed by end Q4 2024/25.

In addition, the risk relating to lack of appropriate feedback and, in broad terms, people assuming the Council doesn't take any notice of what they have to say, has been highlighted as part of the toolkit. Therefore, no recommendation was made relating to the lack of identified risks and mitigations of these risks.



The Council Community Engagement Team utilises Engagement HQ, accessed by residents via the Let's Talk Dacorum website platform. This allows for community feedback and access to council project information. Access to the platform is managed through three levels: three site administrators from the communications team, Hub administrators and Project administrators. A list of members of staff having access and their job role was obtained and reviewed. There were no issues identified.



The Head of Communications and Engagement advised that monitoring reports are produced and distributed for each consultation as per the Consultation Brief/Consultation Checklist.

In addition, a weekly report goes to the Senior Leadership Team which includes a small section on Community Engagement i.e. Total number of registrations on the Let's Talk Dacorum Platform and a list of all live/open consultations.

The reports relating to the Parking Consultation and Local Plan were obtained and reviewed. The following was noted:

Parking Consultation

Dacorum BC Community Impact Assessment

This included the following:

- The Basis of the Plan.
- The recommendations i.e. the new fees proposal.
- Who has been consulted.
- Analysis of Impact on Protected Group.
- Parking Consultation Summary and Survey.
- The proposed changes to the tariffs and charges.
- Reasons for the changes.
- Equality Impact Analysis.
- What happens next.
- Survey Questions.
- Survey Response Report.
- Analysis of the Survey Questions.

Other Findings

Cabinet Report

- Purpose of the report.
- Recommendations.
- Period for post policy/ project review.

Local Plan

Reg 18 Task List 2023

- EHQ Engagement Site (Statutory Requirement).
- Public Notice (SCI Requirement).
- Deposit Points (General Printing Statutory Requirement).
- DBC (Website Statutory Requirement).
- Formal Notification (Statutory Requirement).
- Press Release (SCI Requirement).
- Other additional requirements such as community events, videos and social media).

Marketing and Communications Plan

- Purpose and Budget (Not completed).
- Objectives/Target.
- Audience Insight.
- Strategy/Idea.
- Implementation of Communication.
- Scoring/Evaluation.
- Project Plan and Evaluation.



The Head of Communications and Engagement advised that no spot checks are currently being conducted relating to the adherence to the Toolkit due to a lack of resources. However, as part of the new structure they will be a dedicated Engagement Officer whose role will involve monitoring project compliance in relation to the adherence to the Toolkit.

In addition, an organisation wide audit of all community engagement activity was due to be undertaken in August 2024 however this is still work in progress.



The Head of Communications and Engagement advised that there is no specific training on the toolkit, however officers are invited to engage with the communications service if they have any questions. There is training provided to all officers who need to run a project on the Let's Talk platform, and this is offered through the provider via an interactive training webinar once a week.



Delivery Risk:

Failure to deliver the service in an effective manner which meets the requirements of the organisation.

Ref	Expected Key Risk Mitigation	Effectiveness of arrangements	Cross Reference to MAP	Cross Reference to OEM	
PM	Performance Monitoring	There are agreed KPIs for the process which align with the business plan requirements and are independently monitored, with corrective action taken in a timely manner.	Partially in place	2, & 3	-
S	Sustainability	The impact on the organisation's sustainability agenda has been considered.	In place	-	-
R	Resilience	Good practice to respond to business interruption events and to enhance the economic, effective and efficient delivery is adopted.	In place	-	-

Other Findings



The Head of Communications and Engagement advised there is no set budget for Community Engagement. However, the Let's Talk Dacorum website Platform is funded through the Strategic Planning Team. For all other activities relating to Community Engagement a certain percentage is recharged to the relevant service.



The Head of Communications and Engagement confirmed that the consultation toolkit was developed with the Local Government Association Guide: New Conversations, LGA Guide to Engagement.

Scope and Limitations of the Review

1. The definition of the type of review, the limitations and the responsibilities of management in regard to this review are set out in the Annual Plan. As set out in the Audit Charter, substantive testing is only carried out where this has been agreed with management and unless explicitly shown in the scope no such work has been performed.

Disclaimer

2. The matters raised in this report are only those that came to the attention of the auditor during the course of the review and are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the weaknesses that exist or all the improvements that might be made. This report has been prepared solely for management's use and must not be recited or referred to in whole or in part to third parties without our prior written consent. No responsibility to any third party is accepted as the report has not been prepared, and is not intended, for any other purpose. TIAA neither owes nor accepts any duty of care to any other party who may receive this report and specifically disclaims any liability for loss, damage or expense of whatsoever nature, which is caused by their reliance on our report.

Effectiveness of Arrangements

3. The definitions of the effectiveness of arrangements are set out below. These are based solely upon the audit work performed, assume business as usual, and do not necessarily cover management override or exceptional circumstances.

In place	The control arrangements in place mitigate the risk from arising.
Partially in place	The control arrangements in place only partially mitigate the risk from arising.
Not in place	The control arrangements in place do not effectively mitigate the risk from arising.

Assurance Assessment

4. The definitions of the assurance assessments are:

Substantial Assurance	There is a robust system of internal controls operating effectively to ensure that risks are managed and process objectives achieved.
Reasonable Assurance	The system of internal controls is generally adequate and operating effectively but some improvements are required to ensure that risks are managed and process objectives achieved.
Limited Assurance	The system of internal controls is generally inadequate or not operating effectively and significant improvements are required to ensure that risks are managed and process objectives achieved.
No Assurance	There is a fundamental breakdown or absence of core internal controls requiring immediate action.

Acknowledgement

5. We would like to thank staff for their co-operation and assistance during the course of our work.

Release of Report

6. The table below sets out the history of this report.

Stage	Issued	Response Received
Audit Planning Memorandum:	3 rd June 2024	3 rd June 2024
Draft Report:	10 th October 2024	21 st October 2024
Final Report:	22 nd October 2024	