

EXTERNAL SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE - JOURNALISM AND LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Committee name	External Services Select Committee
Officer reporting	Nikki O'Halloran, Corporate Services and Transformation
Papers with report	None
Ward	n/a

HEADLINES

To enable the Committee to receive information on the role of journalism and online forums in local democracy in Hillingdon.

RECOMMENDATION

That the External Services Select Committee notes the discussion.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

At its meeting on 16 June 2021, the Committee agreed that it would like to look at journalism and local democracy at its meeting on 23 November 2021. Members would look to establish the role of journalism and online discussion forums in the Borough with regard to local democracy and look at how journalism has changed.

LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Public confidence in a democratic and well governed Council is achieved through Democratic Services' (and the Council's) aim of "putting our residents first". Residents are given many opportunities to have their say or directly engage in the way the Council makes decisions. The Council fosters strong local accountability by making sure residents are aware who is responsible at the political, elected level for leading on issues and decisions that are in their interest. However, it is worth noting that there may have been recent changes or pauses in the delivery of some engagement activities.

Engagement Events and Activities

Councillors have previously attended the Council's Streets Ahead / Pride of Place days to promote residents' pride in their area and make it safer, cleaner and greener. At these events, more than 30 teams from the Council and local partners work together to take enforcement action, provide education and engage with the local community at a ward level. Councillors encourage local residents to sign up to the Street Champions Scheme enabling residents themselves to become the eyes and ears of the Council and quickly resolve problems for residents in their road.

Mayoral and other civic and ceremonial activities are held to bring the wider local community together at important times. Citizenship Ceremonies are co-ordinated by Democratic Services to welcome new residents to both the Borough and the UK.

Local Authority Meetings

Residents seem to value the Cabinet Member Petition Hearings undertaken by the Council where, in an informal setting, residents and Ward Councillors can meet directly with the relevant Cabinet Member to try and influence his or her view on a matter raised in a petition before they make a formal decision on the night. To encourage engagement with young people, these meetings have been held in local schools when the children at those schools have campaigned on road safety issues. Furthermore, residents can set up petitions through the Council's website instead of collecting signatures on a paper petition. In addition to Petition Hearings, there are mechanisms in place to allow residents to speak at planning and licensing committee meetings on matters in their locality, engaging directly with Council decision-makers.

The Council's statutory policy overview and scrutiny role is well developed and holds local partners and wider public bodies to account whilst developing policy proposals through its Select Committees. These Select Committees have reviewed a range of health, crime and disorder and policy related issues and made recommendations to Cabinet to improve the services provided to local residents. A significant number of witnesses, service users, experts and residents are involved in the Select Committee process each year.

To further enhance the promotion of various initiatives, events and activities across social media platforms, the Council started live broadcasting a range of Committee meetings on YouTube in 2016. Broadcasting these meetings has enabled thousands of Hillingdon residents (and others) to engage in a modern, immersive and direct way with the democratic process.

Elections

The Council actively encourages eligible residents to participate and vote in local, regional and national elections. The authority also undertakes publicity campaigns to improve the percentage return of electoral registration forms and turnout at election time. Once elected, elected Ward Councillors actively work with local residents, schools, community groups, Safer Neighbourhood Teams, etc, to improve the day-to-day quality of life for their local residents.

Witnesses

The following witnesses have been invited to attend the meeting:

- Rachel Sharp, Senior Lecturer - Journalism, Brunel University
- Steve Parker, Uxbridge FM
- Joshua Neicho, freelance journalist, OnLondon

Possible Key Lines of Enquiry

1. What role does journalism have with regard to local democracy?
2. How has journalism changed?
3. What developments can be expected in future with regard to journalism?
4. How can journalism help residents to become more engaged in the local democratic process?
5. How can democracy be promoted amongst young people?