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Citizens' Panel Newsletter

Ashfield DISTRICT COUNCIL

• ISSUE ONE • • APRIL 2025 •

East Midlands Combined County Authority Meeting | Monday 3 March 2025

Here is a summary from the East Midlands Combined County (EMCCA) meeting, provided by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA).

Daisy from the RSA and two representatives from Ashfield District Council met with panel members to discuss how Ashfield has changed, what a positive future could look like and the steps needed to get there.

Residents spoke about a strong sense of community in the past, with workplaces, social clubs, and youth centres bringing people together. Over time, these spaces have disappeared, leaving people feeling more isolated and disconnected. Many felt that when communities lose shared spaces, people start to feel like they don't matter, which can affect people's confidence, ambition and well-being.

Job opportunities have also changed. There used to be plenty of work, but mainly in the manual jobs market. Now, even those roles have disappeared, and young people don't have clear or accessible paths into secure, well-paid careers.

Housing and public services were key concerns. Many empty and derelict buildings could be repurposed for housing or community use but remain unused. Social services, youth support, and mental health provision were seen as underfunded and reactive, rather than proactive and preventative.

Despite the challenges, residents saw real potential for Ashfield to rebuild its sense of community, opportunity and local pride — but it will take long-term investment, leadership and a commitment to putting people at the heart of change.

A Vision for 2035: A stronger, more connected Ashfield

Residents imagined a future where people feel valued, supported and connected. Key ideas included:

- Restoring community spaces – Turning empty buildings into places for people to gather, access support and rebuild connections across generations.
- Expanding vocational training and apprenticeships – Ensuring young people have real choices about their futures, with practical support to help them train, travel and work locally.
- Investing in public services – Strengthening mental health, social care and youth services to provide stability for individuals and families.
- Bringing empty buildings back into community use – Using compulsory purchase orders to transform derelict spaces into housing, education and local enterprise hubs.
- Celebrating and strengthening local pride – Highlighting success stories, encouraging community-led projects and creating opportunities for creativity and connection.

YOU SAID WE DID

You said: *"Engagement should be accessible and should include different methods to suit different people."*

We are incorporating this within our commitment to inclusive engagement. The use of different methods, suitable for a range of residents, is encouraged within the toolkit for Council staff.

You said: *"Engagement shouldn't be carried out just to tick boxes."*

We are ensuring staff plan engagement opportunities, including through service planning, that are well thought out and meaningful, with the feedback adding value to our processes.

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ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

We held a live survey throughout January and February with panel members to look at engagement across Ashfield. The outcome of this has helped to shape our Community Engagement Strategy. This is due to go live in the next few months. Over 85% of panel members agreed with the values outlined within the strategy. The remaining 15% were neutral, suggesting that they are keen to see evidence of these values in practice. Some of the key reasons why residents want to engage with the Council are:

- Improve Ashfield and shape the future of the District.
- Give back to the community.
- Increase diverse voices in Council services and policy making.
- Challenge and/or support Council initiatives.

For further information about the Community Engagement Strategy, please email improvement@ashfield.gov.uk

KEY TOPICS RAISED

Through conducting surveys and being out and about talking to both panel members and residents of Ashfield, we have been able to generate a list of topics for future discussion.

These include:

1. Anti-social behaviour
2. Recycling
3. Sense of community

We are looking to incorporate these key topics into future events with our panel members. In the meantime, please contact us if you have any thoughts or contributions.

WHAT'S COMING UP?

We are developing a new website and once this has been launched we will be asking you to carry out some testing. This would involve choosing one or more scenarios and using our website to find the correct service area. This is to help us ensure the website is user friendly for our residents. Your feedback would help make sure any changes we make are meaningful.

Thank you all for being part of our Citizens' Panel. Your participation will help us to strengthen the voices of our communities across Ashfield.

If you have any questions or topics you would like us to consider, please feel free to contact us.

YOU SAID WE DID

You said: *"Engagement should put people first and feedback should be listened to."*

We are incorporating this within our People Focused Corporate value to ensure engagement will be value-adding, meaning feedback will be considered when making decisions.

You said: *"The Council should be transparent and should communicate how decisions have been made with their residents."*

We are committed to being honest and communicating clearly about how we have arrived at a decision, considering how engagement has influenced this.

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