
Meeting: Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 25 July 2011
Subject: Community Engagement Strategy - refresh
Report of: Cllr David Hopkin, Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources
Summary: This report introduces the draft refresh of the Community Engagement Strategy (CES) for discussion and presents the performance achieved against Year 1 actions of the 2010 – 2013 delivery plan. An update on the refresh will be presented at the meeting, including proposals to turn the Strategy into policy for the Council.

Advising Officer: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services
Contact Officer: Peter Fraser, Head of Partnerships & Performance
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The strategy has implications for all five of the Council's strategic priorities.

Financial:

Funding is critical to the implementation of some aspects of the strategy and delivery plan. Funding has been secured from the Central Together Partnership Board (CBT - the local strategic partnership) to provide a dedicated staff member to coordinate delivery of the actions contained in Years 2 and 3 of the delivery plan.

Legal:

Implementing this strategy will help the local authority and its partners to deliver its community engagement obligations. The related Strategy also incorporates some elements of the emerging implications of the Localism Bill.

Risk Management:

Risk management is a key part of the service delivery plan for the team and any risks will be managed through this process. The key risks associated with community engagement relate to reputational damage, by not engaging with relevant stakeholders, and the failure to meet statutory duties relating to the current duty to involve. A raft of further duties relating to community engagement will be placed on the Council as a result of the Localism Bill.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

The strategy comprises a small centralised corporate resource, one staff member of which is paid for by CBT partnership funding.

Equalities/Human Rights:

The impact assessment highlighted the importance of adopting a variety of inclusive and appropriate engagement practises and that all groups must be treated with dignity and respect. These issues have been addressed during the development of the strategy and subsequently in the delivery of Year 1 activity whilst the impact of the new Equality Duty is a key driver for the refresh.

Community Safety:

Community engagement is and will continue to be a key element to tackling crime and reducing the fear of crime.

Sustainability:

The Community Engagement Strategy will help to strengthen and empower communities to do more for themselves and relieve pressure on public services.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. To note performance against the actions in the first year of the delivery plan.**
- 2. To endorse the draft refresh of the Community Engagement Strategy.**
- 3. To agree the proposed policy statements to ensure the Council applies the principles of the Strategy consistently across directorates.**
- 4. To agree to the proposal to develop a policy position for the Council to deliver Localism once the legislation in the Bill is better understood.**

1. Background Information

- 1.1 The Community Engagement Strategy is a partnership strategy, which was developed by Central Bedfordshire Together (CBT) and approved by Full Council in June 2010.
- 1.2 It is a three year strategy, covering the period 2010-13, and CBT has committed to carrying out an annual refresh.
- 1.3 The rational and process for refreshing the Strategy was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its June meeting, and was agreed by the CBT Board on 5 July.

- 1.4 Members agreed that the CES did require review, given the scale and potential impact of significant legislative change, and that the review should be transforming in nature to ensure the refreshed document was forward looking, focussed on delivery and capable of becoming Council policy across all directorates.

2. Year 1 Performance

- 2.1 A summary of key achievements under each of the five principles was reported at the last meeting, and Members requested further information regarding the progress against all of the delivery plan actions in 2010/11.
- 2.2 The CES Delivery Plan set out 41 specific actions for the first year and good overall progress has been made against each of these. Appendix B details the current status on each action using a traditional Red Amber Green approach. It also identifies those actions which can be removed as completed, and those which need to be rolled forward into years 2 and 3 of the Strategy.

3. Refresh 2011

- 3.1 Since the strategy was developed a new legislative framework has begun to emerge to build the Big Society. The Localism Bill, which is due to be enacted in November 2011, will support a shift of power away from central government to councils and local communities. A fundamental element of this is to empower local people to get involved with and direct the development of their communities. Whilst the existing strategy supports this, a refresh will ensure it is fully aligned with the latest national policy, and ensure our organisational approach is fully aligned and becomes recognised policy within the council.
- 3.2 The refresh for 2011/12 has focused on:
- removing any actions already achieved or no longer relevant;
 - refreshing the principles to ensure the key drivers are adequately embraced; and
 - ensuring the Strategy is aligned with the latest national policy and local aspirations.

- 3.3 The national and local drivers that are being addressed as part of the refresh include:
- reviewing and updating the strategy and action plan to reflect the latest (known) policy and guidance in the Localism Bill;
 - a genuine desire to enhance our engagement with communities (ensuring meaningful consultation);
 - communities doing more for themselves and the need to proactively facilitate this;
 - service and organisational reviews and remodelling of delivery approaches, and overcoming obstacles associated with the transfer of responsibility for the delivery of local services;
 - a cultural shift to embrace and mainstream wider involvement and engagement in the delivery of public services;
 - the new Equality Duty to ensure we engage with all of Central Bedfordshire's diverse communities; and
 - a raft of other legislation driving considerable change within partner organisations and impacting on community and stakeholder engagement.

4. The revised Strategy

- 4.1 A copy of the latest draft of the revised Strategy is attached as Appendix A.
- 4.2 The key changes to the original document include re-wording the introductory pages to make it more concise, flow better and to remove any duplication of text. To streamline the document, the "executive summary" has been removed, along with the sections on "structures", "success measures" and "values" – these will be included as part of the action plan, which will follow once the refreshed strategy is agreed.
- 4.3 The main body of the Strategy is Section 7 "delivering the strategy" as this sets out what we and our partners will actually do. For that reason, this section also shows what existing text is recommended for removal from the document.
- 4.4 Any further revisions to the Strategy, based on feedback from Members, officers and partners, will be presented at the Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 25 July.

5. Developing Policy

- 5.1 A key element of the refresh is to develop policy to support implementation of the Strategy and to ensure a consistent and corporate approach across the Council.
- 5.2 A set of policy statements will be developed in consultation with Executive Members, officers and partners and these will be presented at the Committee meeting on 25 July for consideration.

- 5.3 It is recommended that a policy position statement regarding implementation of the Localism Bill in Central Bedfordshire is developed once the detail of the emerging legislation it contains is better understood.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 The refreshed Strategy will be recommended to Executive on 23 August for approval, along with a proposed set of policy statements.
- 6.2 Once the refreshed Strategy is agreed, the Community Engagement Delivery Group will review and update the action plan, and the Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership will oversee its implementation and monitor delivery on behalf of CBT.

7. Financial and Other Implications

- 7.1 Any financial implications associated with its implementation will be managed within the existing budget allocation.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Central Bedfordshire Community Engagement Strategy Refresh, July 2011

Appendix B – Community Engagement Strategy Delivery Plan performance report - Year 1