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**Meeting:** Executive

**Date:** 23 August 2011

**Subject:** Community Engagement Strategy - Refresh

**Report of:** Cllr Maurice Jones, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources

**Summary:** This report introduces the annual refresh of the Community Engagement Strategy (CES) for approval and presents the performance achieved against Year 1 actions of the 2010 – 2013 delivery plan. The strategy is supported by a set of policy statements to ensure the principles are applied consistently across the Council.

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**Advising Officer:** Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services

**Contact Officer:** Peter Fraser, Head of Partnerships & Performance

**Public/Exempt:** Public

**Wards Affected:** All

**Function of:** Council

**Key Decision** Yes

**Reason for urgency/  
exemption from call-in  
(if appropriate)** N/A

## **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.

**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:**

A comprehensive equality impact assessment was carried out when the strategy was written. This highlighted the importance of adopting a variety of inclusive and appropriate engagement practices 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. The impact of the new Equality Duty is a key driver for the refresh and its implications for the strategy have been captured in the revised strategy and supporting policy statements.

**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.

**Summary of Overview and Scrutiny Comments:**

The Committee noted the performance against actions in the first year of the delivery plan and endorsed the draft refresh of the Community Engagement Strategy. It supported the empowerment of the community and noted that the Council was “ahead of the field” in this area.

Members asked that a reference to equality impact assessments, as required by the Equalities Act, be included in principle 3 of the strategy.

The Committee made the following recommendations to the Executive:

1. that the performance against the actions in the first year of the delivery plan be noted;.
2. that the refresh of the Community Engagement Strategy be endorsed;
3. that the proposed policy statements to ensure that the principles of the strategy are applied consistently across the Council be agreed; and
4. that the proposal to develop a policy position for the Council to deliver localism once the legislation in the Bill is better understood, be agreed.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **The Executive is asked to:**

- 1. note and comment on performance against the actions in the first year of the delivery plan;**
- 2. endorse the annual refresh of the Community Engagement Strategy;**
- 3. agree the proposed policy statements to ensure the principles of the Strategy are applied consistently across the Council; and**
- 4. agree that a policy position statement and action plan, regarding implementation of the Localism Bill in Central Bedfordshire, is developed once the detail of the emerging legislation it contains is better understood.**

<i>Reason for Recommendations:</i>	<i>To ensure the strategy is aligned with the latest national policy and local aspirations and is applied consistently across the Council.</i>
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## **Executive Summary**

Community engagement is critical in helping the Council (and its partners) to understand our communities better, which leads to well informed decision-making. The Open Public Services White Paper sets out the Government's vision to open up the delivery of public services to businesses, charities and voluntary and community groups, and the Localism Bill will provide the legislative framework to make this happen. The Bill is aimed at shifting power away from the centre to local government and communities. It supports the devolution of services to the lowest appropriate level and encourages the public sector to tap into community resources by facilitating communities to do more for themselves. This strategy will enable the Council to fulfil its role in making this happen.

## **Introduction**

1. The Community Engagement Strategy (CES) is a partnership strategy, which was developed by Central Bedfordshire Together (CBT) and approved by Full Council in June 2010.
2. The aim of the CES is to deliver greater added value to our citizens by understanding their needs and issues, and giving them greater involvement in the decision-making process and access to services.
3. It is a three year strategy, covering the period 2010-13, and CBT has committed to carrying out an annual refresh.

## **Year 1 Performance**

4. The CES Delivery Plan sets out 41 specific actions for the first year and good overall progress has been made against each of these.

5. A performance management system is in place and is overseen by the Community Engagement Delivery Group. This is made up of representatives from partner organisations and a number of service teams across the Council. It is a sub-group of the Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership of CBT and its purpose is to consider the detailed day-to-day activities of partners that contribute to the delivery of the strategy to ensure a joined-up partnership approach.
6. A copy of the performance report for year 1 is attached as Appendix C to this report.

## **The Refresh**

7. Since the strategy was first developed a new legislative framework has begun to emerge to build the Big Society. The Localism Bill provides a framework to 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 supported this, the refresh has ensured it is fully aligned with the latest national policy and local aspirations.
8. The national and local drivers addressed as part of the refresh include:
  - Reviewing and updating the strategy to reflect the latest (known) implications for community empowerment in the Localism Bill.
  - A political 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, e.g. working much more closely with town and parish councils.
  - The new Equality Duty to ensure we engage with all of Central Bedfordshire's diverse communities.
  - A raft of other legislation driving considerable change within partner organisations that impact on community and stakeholder engagement, e.g. Health and Social Care Reform and the Education Bill.
9. A copy of the refreshed strategy is attached at Appendix A to this report. Any new text that has been added appears as either shaded or underlined. The shaded text refers to national policy and the underlined text relates to local aspirations. This is to enable Members to easily see what has been added and why.

## **Community Engagement Policy Statements**

10. A key element of the refresh is to develop supporting policy statements to ensure that the principles of the strategy are applied consistently across the Council.
11. A set of 30 policy statements has been developed by Members of the Customer and Shared Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in consultation with officers and partners and these are attached at Appendix B.

## **Conclusion and Next Steps**

12. 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.
13. 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. This will be submitted to the Executive in February 2012.

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Community Engagement Strategy refresh July 2011

Appendix B – Policy statements for community engagement

Appendix C – Community Engagement Strategy Year 1 performance report

**Background Papers:** None