

Appendix B: Community Engagement Policies

Principle 1: Giving more people more opportunities to inform and influence decisions

Policy Statements

Consultation:

- All formal written consultations undertaken by the Council should be registered on the consultation database. Officers should inform the Consultation team and seek appropriate advice. Officers should refer to the consultation toolkit and ensure compliance with the Bedfordshire and Luton Compact. Wherever possible, consultations should allow a period of 12 weeks for written responses.
- Formal consultations should only take place where there is a statutory requirement to do so and/or where the outcome of the consultation will influence or inform the decision.
- Officers should ensure that any citizens who have registered their interest in being consulted via the Citizens E-panel are involved.
- In accordance with the requirements of the Equality Duty, accurate details of any engagement activity, including who has been engaged, how, and the outcome must be recorded and published.

Scrutiny:

- The Council will aim to have at least two investigations per year which involve significant public participation

Forums:

- When a new engagement forum is created this should be entered onto the stakeholder database to enable any Council services and partners to consult and engage with all sections of the community.

Social Media:

- Officers should use a variety of mechanisms for community engagement to ensure all sections of the community can participate. This will include use of the Council's social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Let's Talk Together:

- Two rounds of Let's Talk Together meetings will be held each year (autumn and spring) in the following areas:
 - Cranfield, Marston and Woburn
 - Sandy and Biggleswade
 - Ampthill and Flitwick
 - Shefford, Stotfold and Arlesey

- Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Rural area
 - Leighton Rural
 - Leighton Buzzard and Linslade.
- Meetings will be chaired by an Executive Member or their nominee.
 - Officers should use these meetings to promote or undertake consultation with communities on local issues.

Principle 2: Enabling Ward Members to be leaders in and for their communities

Policy Statements

Profiles:

- Ward and Town profiles will be provided annually to all Members.

Inform:

- Officers must inform relevant Ward Members of any area based issues that they are working on, including any consultation or engagement activities taking place, in their wards or likely to impact upon them.
- Officers should seek the advice and involvement of relevant Ward Members at the outset.

Support:

- Members will be provided with a short strategic update document in advance of their attendance at town and parish council meetings.

Principle 3: Enhancing the role of Town and Parish Councils

Policy Statements

Communication and response:

- Officers should inform town and parish council clerks and chairs of any consultation or engagement activity taking place in or likely to impact on their parishes, and where appropriate seek their advice and involvement.
- Officers should use the contact details for clerks and chairs in Outlook when using email. Officers should be aware that not all clerks and chairs have an email address, so written communication should also be provided using the contact details on the stakeholder database.

- Ward Members will be the named key contact on behalf of the Council for communication with town and parish councils.
- Where a request from a town or parish council is made to an officer a response will be provided within 5 working days, in accordance with the Council's Customer Charter.

Neighbourhood Plans:

- The Council will develop a Statement of Community Involvement that will set out the process and support that communities can expect to create a Neighbourhood Plan.

Conferences:

- The Council will hold two Town and Parish Council Conferences each year.

Devolving Services:

- Officers must inform the Head of Partnerships of any requests or plans relating to the devolvement of a service, along with the relevant Member(s).
- Any requests to devolve a service to a town or parish council must be supported by a strong business case that demonstrates improved value for money.
- An Equality Impact Assessment must be carried out before a service is devolved.
- Where a budget is to be transferred with a devolved service this will be distributed by allocating the pro rata costs for delivering the same service on a broader area-wide basis (after taking into account any planned budget cuts or service remodelling).
- Where appropriate, the transfer of services should follow a commissioning or tendering procurement process.
- Where consideration is being given to stop or significantly reduce a service the relevant town and parish councils it impacts upon should be informed at the outset.
- Any work to explore alternative options in terms of transferring responsibilities for a service away from the Council will be agreed by the relevant Executive Member and Director (or their nominee) with final decisions being taken in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

Principle 4: Building the capacity of local people to engage and to do more for themselves

Policy Statements

Third Sector Assembly:

- The Council will use Third Sector Assembly to consult and involve voluntary and community organisations in the planning, shaping and design of services.

Localism:

- The Council will develop a strategy and policy to deliver the community empowerment elements of the Localism Bill such as the Community Right to Challenge and Community Right to Buy, and engage with partners and communities to deliver it.

Principle 5: To ensuring a strategic and joined-up, coordinated partnership approach

Policy Statements

Co-ordination:

- Officers must, wherever possible, co-ordinate and align their consultation and engagement activity with that of other service teams and partner organisations to maximise the efficient use of resources and minimise confusion within communities

Stakeholders:

- Officers should use the use the Stakeholder data base to identify target groups for engagement. The data base is regularly updated and provides the most up to date data on local stakeholder groups.