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**Meeting:** Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 18 December 2012  
**Subject:** Community Engagement Strategy – 2013-16  
**Report of:** Cllr Maurice Jones, Executive Member for Corporate Resources  
**Summary:** This report introduces the process and timetable for the preparation of the Community Engagement Strategy (CES) 2013-2016

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**Advising Officer:** Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services  
**Contact Officer:** Peter Fraser, Head of Partnerships & Community Engagement  
**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:**

There are no specific financial implications associated with the development of the strategy.

### **Legal:**

Implementing this strategy will help the local authority and its partners to deliver its obligations regarding elements of the Localism Act 2011 and the Equality Duty.

### **Risk Management:**

Risk management is a key part of the service delivery plan for the team and risks are managed through the directorate and corporate risk management process. The key risks associated with community engagement relate to reputational damage, by not engaging with relevant stakeholders. A raft of further duties relating to community engagement have been placed on the Council as a result of the Localism Act 2011 and the Equality Duty.

### **Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

There are no specific staffing implications associated with the strategy.

### **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 the existing strategy. The new strategy will include all relevant references to the Equality Duty.

### **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 comment upon progress to develop the new Community Engagement Strategy (CES) 2013-16, comment on the results of desk research and discussions with partners and agree the issues that need to be addressed in the new CES 2013 -2016.**
- 2. To comment upon the summary of performance against the actions in the 2010-13 Community Engagement Strategy set out in Appendix A.**

## **1. Background Information**

- 1.1 The 2010 – 13 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 The aim of the CES is to deliver greater added value to our citizens by understanding their needs and issues, and give them greater involvement in the decision-making process and access to services.
- 1.3 The current CES has five principles which have been mapped against the National Framework for Empowering Authorities. These are:
  - Giving more people more opportunities to influence decisions;
  - Enabling Ward Councillors to be leaders in and for their communities;
  - Enhancing the role of Town and Parish Councils (T&PCs);
  - Building the capacity of local people to engage; and
  - Ensuring a strategic and joined up co-ordinated partnership approach.

## **2. Performance**

- 2.1 A summary of achievements of the current strategy is detailed in Appendix A.

### 3. Developing the new strategy 2013 -2016

- 3.1 The new CES will build on the achievements of the current strategy, ensuring engagement with local communities is at the heart of our strategies, plans and processes. The principles of working in partnership with communities to help them do more for themselves is evermore relevant in the face of new legislation and reducing resources.
- 3.2 The process to develop the new strategy began during the summer 2012 and will include:
- One-to-one discussions with key stakeholders and partner organisations.
  - Review of best practise.
  - Review of the current strategy.
  - Collation of feedback and preparation of an issues and options report.
  - Discussion with key stakeholder groups, Ward Councillors; voluntary and community sector organisations and town and parish councils.
  - Review by Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
  - Consultation on a draft strategy.
  - Final strategy sign off endorsement in March and sign off in June 2013.

### 4. Key Findings

- 4.1 A summary of the key findings from desk research, and one-to-one discussions with partner organisations and service teams, is summarised below:
- 4.1.1 **Issues**
- a. New Legislation (Localism Act /Health and Social Care Act/ The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, Welfare Reform.
  - b. New community rights.
  - c. Neighbourhood Planning with statutory status.
  - d. New roles and responsibilities for local authorities ( e.g. Public Health).
  - e. New roles and responsibilities e.g. Police and Crime Commissioners and Police and Crime Panels; Clinical Commissioning Groups, Local Healthwatch but uncertainty as to impact on current engagement and services.
  - f. Changes in public service delivery including co production and devolution.
  - g. New and growing forms of communication e.g. via social media.
  - h. A tightening of public sector resources.
  - i. Strong support and endorsement of the current strategy principles.
  - j. Value of face to face community engagement, in particular with service users; issue driven.
  - k. Lack of effective and established means for engaging and involving non service users and specific groups.
  - l. Balancing expectation with actuality and realism.
  - m. Lack of meaningful partnership working delivering business outcomes.
  - n. Capacity, resources and skills to engage.
  - o. Keeping Members informed.
  - p. How well do we know our communities?
  - q. How we address equality, and appropriate methods to engage with particular communities e.g. Gypsy and Traveller communities.

#### 4.1.2

### **Opportunities**

- a. Considerable partner and service support for the current CES and its five principles.
- b. Desire to build on the approach established by the current CES and its successes, and strengthen certain aspects.
- c. Consensus that community engagement is vital to service delivery, achieving value for money and delivering positive outcomes for the business and the user.
- d. Opportunity to transform the CES into a strategy to implement localism (communities being enabled to do more for themselves).
- e. Additional opportunities for more people to get engaged in service design and delivery via Local Healthwatch, membership of Clinical Commissioning Groups, Neighbourhood Planning and new community rights, backed up by more support to help people to engage.
- f. Support for continued, improved and sustained face-to-face engagement by adopting a more business-like outcome-focussed approach.
- g. Opportunity to strengthen the role of social media in community engagement.
- h. Opportunity for the CES to help facilitate and sustain positive outcomes e.g. for Troubled Families through partnership co-ordination, helping communities to help themselves and ward councillors as leaders in their communities.
- i. Opportunity to widen support to include enhancing the role of volunteers, voluntary and community sector organisations in service delivery e.g. through Transforming Local Infrastructure.
- j. Opportunity to embrace ceremonial engagement activity undertaken by the Chairman and Lord Lieutenantcy.
- k. Opportunity to redefine services and adopt multi functional roles e.g. libraries
- l. Opportunity to embrace business engagement activity.
- m. Organisational change to better meet local needs and achieve better fit across partners from prevention to response.
- n. Opportunity to minimise the impact of sanctions through better community engagement activity.
- o. Opportunity to improve on equality aspects in particular knowing our communities and using appropriate methods to engage successfully.

#### 4.2

### **Impact of new legislation**

#### 4.2.1

### **Localism Act 2011**

The Government has introduced new legislation which has a significant impact on community engagement. For the most part the new legislation offers more opportunity for residents to engage and influence decisions, priorities or services, or builds the capacity of community and voluntary groups to deliver services. The key elements affecting community engagement are:

- General power of competence
- Abolition of the Standards Board
- Greater local control of business rates
- Directly elected mayors
- Community right to challenge
- Community right to bid

- Right to approve or veto excessive council tax rises
- Abolition of regional planning strategies
- Neighbourhood planning
- Community right to build

#### 4.2.2 **Police and Social Responsibility Act 2011**

The key component of this Act and the opportunities for Community Engagement are to re-establish the link between the police and the public and make the police service more accountable to local people by replacing police authorities with directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners.

#### 4.2.3 **Health and Social Care Act 2012**

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 puts clinicians at the centre of commissioning, frees up providers to innovate, empowers patients and gives a new focus to public health. The Act establishes new Healthwatch patient organisations locally and nationally to drive patient involvement across the NHS. The Act also gives local authorities a new role to join up local health and social care services.

Clinical Commissioning Groups will have to consult the public on their annual commissioning plans and involve them in any changes that affect patient services. They will also operate a membership scheme so that residents receive regular alerts and updates.

#### 4.2.4 **Town Teams**

Following the 2011 Portas review about the future of Town Centres twelve Portas Pilots Towns were approved. Due to the large number of applications received (371) the Government has since announced financial support for a number of Town Teams across the country. Town Teams engage local retailers to develop activity to enhance the vitality of their town centres. Dunstable and Leighton Linlade both have active town teams engaging with the Council on ways to enhance and improve their town centres.

#### 4.2.5 **Troubled Families**

The Government has introduced a programme to encourage local authorities and their partners to improve the support received by families experiencing a number of complex and often inter related issues that prevent them from playing a full and positive role in society. Such families may already be known to local authorities and partner organisations, and are selected if they fulfil a number of criteria:

- they are involved with crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB);
- they have children not in school;
- they have an adult on out of work benefits; and / or
- they cause high costs to the public purse.

The programme can benefit from active and co-ordinated community engagement not only by the families themselves, but by local residents and communities taking an active role in supporting neighbouring troubled families e.g. through volunteering and community based activity and through a community based network of support to help sustain the interventions and improvements felt by those families.

4.2.6

**The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012**

This Act explicitly requires public bodies to consider how procured services improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area to be covered by the contract; and where appropriate, to write that social value objective into the procurement process.

4.3

A review of best practice elsewhere identified a range of good examples of using different types of engagement activity, such as the web and social media, as well as face-to-face engagement - all of which are undertaken in Central Bedfordshire. However, where we differ is the added value of taking a partnership approach to community engagement.

4.4

**Options for the new CES 2013- 2016**

The table below draws together the key issues, opportunities and options for the new CES:

<b>Issue / Driver</b>	<b>Opportunity</b>	<b>Option for new CES</b>
New legislation and responsibilities	Greater community engagement  Partnership and co-ordination	The vehicle for the implementation of new responsibilities e.g. Community Rights, Neighbourhood Planning  Strengthen principle 1, 4 and 5
Changes in public service delivery , delivering great services, service re design	Issue and Outcome focussed community engagement, co-production and partner involvement in service delivery; people doing more for themselves	Embed engagement in the culture of each organisation, involving TPC's and VCS organisations in service delivery under a co-production approach  Strengthen principles 1-5
How to engage meaningfully, knowing our communities, service users and non users	Knowledge, evidence-based approach; include business engagement  Setting standards for engagement e.g. with Town and Parish Councils (a charter / partnership protocol).	Select the right type of engagement mechanisms e.g. social media to communicate and engage with residents  Issue / outcome approach to face-to-face community engagement  Strengthen principles 1, 2, 4
Tightening public sector resources, balancing expectation and realism. Keeping Members informed, capacity and resources to engage.	Making a difference with our communities and achieving lasting change Sustainability of service outcome.	Asset transfers, timebanking  Strengthen principles 2, 4, 5

## **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1 The 2010 – 2013 strategy provides a strong basis upon which to develop a new strategy covering the next three years (2013 – 2016). The new strategy will ensure we continue to provide a valuable framework for co-ordinated community engagement with partners.
- 5.2 The new strategy will be a short and succinct document that reflects the latest national policy and local aspirations for community engagement. This will be accompanied by a separate delivery plan to ensure progress can be monitored against a small number of key actions.

## **6. Next Steps**

- 6.1 The next step includes holding workshops / briefings to ensure input from key stakeholders; Ward Councillors, voluntary and community sector organisations and town and parish councils on the issues and opportunities described above. Following this, a consultation draft copy of the new strategy will be prepared by February 2013. The timetable
- 6.2 It is anticipated that the new CES will be ready for approval and sign off by Central Bedfordshire Together (CBT) at the end of March 2013. Central Bedfordshire Council, as the Accountable Body for CBT, will formally sign off the Strategy in June 2013 and take the process through its own governance arrangements.

## **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 – Community Engagement Strategy Delivery Plan Summary of Achievements

## **Appendix A**

### **SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS CES 2010-2013**

#### **Giving more people more opportunities to influence decisions**

- 21 Let's Talk Together meetings held across Central Bedfordshire. New locality based approach being developed after review process.
- Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter) and quarterly ezine to over 1100 recipients.
- Residents registered for updates about new consultations from CBC and 7,800 people signed up to receive email alerts.
- Employer Engagement Strategy being developed through on-going relationships and dialogue; signed Business Covenant in place.

#### **Enabling Ward Councillors to be leaders in and for their communities**

- Monthly briefing note sent to all Ward Councillors prior to their T&PC meetings, in addition to weekly editions of the Members Information Bulletin.
- Ward profiles provided to all Ward Members and the Key Facts & Figures about Central Bedfordshire is regularly updated and distributed.
- Policy is in place to ensure Ward Members are informed and consulted as early as possible about activities in their wards.
- Ongoing Member Development programme.

#### **Enhancing the role of town and parish councils**

- Bi-annual Town and Parish Council conferences held, themed on Localism and devolving services.
- A Framework has been published setting out the processes and criteria to devolve services.
- Town partnerships have been established in Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable and a Joint Committee has been formed in Biggleswade.
- Sandy Town Council Community First Panel supported to deliver the Community First programme.
- Project Involve training provided and self help sheets developed to support 45 town and parish councils with their websites.
- Work ongoing with several parishes to help resolve specific community issues.
- Village hall audit and development supported through S106 funding allocation.
- Four parish councils are being supported to develop a Neighbourhood Plan.

#### **Building the capacity of local people to engage**

- A Volunteering Strategy has been produced, and a delivery plan is being developed.
- The LTT provided a vital opportunity for local people to engage with a range of public service providers and determine local policing priorities.
- Bi-annual 'Third Sector' Assembly meetings held to engage community and voluntary sector groups in topical debate and discussion.
- An Armed Forces Community Covenant has been signed by CBT partners and the Armed Forces. Partners and stakeholders are working together to identify projects that will be used to develop bid to the national £30M AFCC grant scheme.



### **Ensuring a strategic and joined up co-ordinated partnership approach**

- The LTT meetings enabled local public service organisations including the Council, Police, Fire, Health, voluntary and community sector, housing associations and town and parish councils to come together to engage with local communities.
- Police and Crime Commissioner Prospectus was developed by partners, and signed off by the CBT Board.
- A forward plan of partner engagement activity was developed for the next 12 months, and is available on the Central Bedfordshire Together website.