
Meeting: Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 30 April 2013
Subject: Community Engagement Strategy – 2013 -16
Report of: Cllr Maurice Jones, Executive Member for Corporate Resources
Summary: This report seeks support for the final draft of the Community Engagement Strategy (CES) 2013-2016 prior to the next steps through Executive in June and adoption by Council in September 2013.

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:

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

Financial:

2. There are no specific financial implications associated with the development of the strategy. Funding has been secured from the Central Together Partnership Board (CBT - the local strategic partnership) for a staff member to coordinate delivery and implementation of the strategy.

Legal:

3. Implementing this strategy will help the Council and its partners to deliver its community engagement obligations, including elements of the Localism Act, the Social Value Act and the Equality Duty.

Risk Management:

4. Risk management is a key part of the service delivery plan for the team and any risks will be 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, the Social Value Act and the Equality Duty. The implementation of the strategy will ensure we mitigate against these risks.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

5. There are no specific staffing implications associated with the strategy. The strategy comprises a small centralised corporate resource, one staff member of which is paid for by CBT.

Equalities/Human Rights:

6. 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.

Public Health

7. The strategy takes into account the impact of new legislation affecting community engagement regarding public health and wellbeing, such as Healthwatch.

Community Safety:

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

Sustainability:

9. The Community Engagement Strategy will help to strengthen and empower communities to do more for themselves, thereby relieving the pressure on public services.

Procurement:

10. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

The Committee is asked to:-

1. **Endorse the final draft of the Community Engagement Strategy, following discussion at the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee (18 December 2012) and the Central Bedfordshire Together Board (7 March 2013).**
2. **Support the next steps through Executive and adoption by Council in September 2013.**
3. **Review and comment upon the supporting policy statements detailed in Appendix B.**

Background Information

11. The new Community Engagement Strategy for 2013 - 2016 is a partnership strategy, which has been led by Central Bedfordshire Together (CBT).
12. 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.

13. At the December meeting of the Committee, Members considered the timetable for developing the strategy and a series of issues and options resulting from feedback from partner organisations and CBC service teams. In response to this the Committee raised the following issues:
- (a) The continuing lack of sufficient and timely engagement with Ward Members regarding events happening within their communities. The Deputy Executive Member acknowledged the issue and confirmed that work was progressing with Directorates to improve communication with Ward Members in future.
 - (b) The need to consider the format of Town & Parish Council forums, possibly providing separate forums for the larger Town Councils.
 - (c) The need to manage expectations regarding the Localism Act and to sell its benefits more intelligently.
 - (d) The need to support the new Police & Crime Commissioner in his role delivering policing strategy across the whole of Bedfordshire. Mention was also made of the role of the Police & Crime Panel, whose meetings were open to the public and in this respect, the Head of Partnerships & Community Engagement agreed to provide Committee Members with the dates of forthcoming meetings.
14. The CBT Board reviewed the draft strategy at their March meeting and concluded that: there should be no more than five principles; the principle to work in partnership and co-ordinate engagement activities could be embraced as an aim of the strategy; two principles could be merged; and the wording of the new principle on business engagement could be improved.

The new Community Engagement Strategy

15. The new CES builds on the achievements of the 2010-2013 strategy ensuring engagement with local communities is at the heart of our strategies and processes. The principles of working in partnership with communities to help them do more for themselves is evermore relevant in the face of the new legislation and diminishing resources.
16. The process to develop the new strategy, which began during the summer 2012, has involved:
- (a) One-to-one discussions with key stakeholders and partner organisations.
 - (b) Review of best practise.
 - (c) Review of the current strategy.
 - (d) Collation of feedback and preparation of an Issues and Options report.
 - (e) Discussion with key stakeholder groups, Ward Councillors; voluntary and community sector organisations and town and parish councils.

- (f) Review by CBC's Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee 18 December 2012.

Strategy outcomes

- 17. The strategy provides partner organisations, Councillors and colleagues with access to information, support, engagement techniques and opportunities to ensure effective service delivery and local impact as follows:
 - (a) Involving our communities in the design and delivery of local services will help us to: improve the quality of service delivery; get it "right first time", be more responsive and accountable; and deliver better value for taxpayers' money.
 - (b) A joined-up strategic and coordinated partnership approach will save money, avoid duplication, and reduce engagement fatigue for our communities. It will also ensure partners have 'One View' about what our communities really want, which will enhance our joint strategic decision-making.
 - (c) Supporting Councillors in their leadership role for their community will help ensure the views of local residents are known and considered by their elected representatives when they make key decisions.
 - (d) Increasing opportunities to participate in local decisions helps increase trust in public bodies and interest in local democracy.
 - (e) Involving people in making decisions about how local money is spent gives communities a better understanding of the difficult prioritisations and trade-offs that have to be made, and a stronger sense of "ownership" over the eventual decision.
 - (f) Bringing communities and local decision-makers together to tackle shared concerns creates greater openness about decision-making and can help improve community cohesion.

Conclusion

- 18. The 2010 – 2013 strategy provided a strong basis upon which to develop the new strategy covering the next three years (2013 – 2016). It continues to provide a valuable framework for co-ordinated community engagement by partners.
- 19. The new strategy is a concise and succinct document that reflects the latest national policy and local aspirations for community engagement. It has been web enabled for ease of use and accessibility. The document has been divided into key sections with links to other websites for more information and access to policies and procedures.

Next Steps

- 20. The Community Engagement Strategy is a partnership strategy and works to the governance frameworks of both Central Bedfordshire Together and the Council. Central Bedfordshire Council, as the Accountable Body for CBT, will formally approve the Strategy at Executive on 25 June 2013 and sign off at Council on 12 September 2013.

21. CBC has developed a number of supporting policy statements to ensure the principles of the strategy are applied consistently across the Council. These are detailed in Appendix B. The Committee is asked to review and comment upon the policy statements to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Financial and Other Implications

22. Any financial implications associated with its implementation will be managed within existing budgets.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Community Engagement Strategy 2013 -2016 v1.0

Appendix B – CBC policy statements