
Meeting: Executive
Date: 25 June 2013
Subject: Community Engagement Strategy – 2013 - 2016
Report of: Cllr Maurice Jones, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources
Summary: The report proposes Executive approval for the final draft of the Community Engagement Strategy (CES) 2013-2016 to be forwarded for 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 and Community Engagement
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council
Key Decision Yes
Reason for urgency/ exemption from call-in (if appropriate) Not applicable

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

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

Financial:

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

Legal:

2. 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:

3. 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):

4. 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:

5. 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

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

Community Safety:

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

Sustainability:

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

Procurement:

9. Not applicable.

Overview and Scrutiny:

10. The draft Strategy has been considered by the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The feedback has been used to amend the strategy document and the supporting policy statements.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Executive is asked to:

- 1. approve the final draft of the Community Engagement Strategy 2013-16;**
- 2. endorse the supporting policy statements; and**
- 3. recommend adoption of the strategy and its supporting policy statements by Council at its meeting in September 2013**

<i>Reason for Recommendations:</i>	<i>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.</i>
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Executive Summary

11. The new Community Engagement Strategy (CES) for 2013 - 2016 is a partnership strategy, which has been led by Central Bedfordshire Together (CBT).
12. It 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 new legislation and diminishing public sector resources.
13. 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.
14. 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.

The New Community Engagement Strategy

15. 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 the Council's Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 December 2012 and 30 April 2013.

Strategy Outcomes

16. 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.

Key Principles

17. The strategy has five key principles:
- i Supporting local people to engage, inform and influence decisions to help shape their communities.
 - ii Enabling Ward Councillors to be leaders in and for their communities.
 - iii Enhancing the role of town and parish councils.
 - iv Enabling more services to be delivered locally.

- v Enabling employers to thrive and play an active role in their local community.

Policy Statements

- 18. Central Bedfordshire Council has developed a number of supporting policy statements to ensure the principles of the strategy are applied consistently across the Council. These have been refreshed and are detailed in Appendix B. Executive is asked to approve the policy statements to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Conclusion

- 19. 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.
- 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 need to formally approve the Strategy and sign off at Council on 12 September 2013.

Financial and Other Implications

- 21. 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 – Central Bedfordshire Council policy statements

Background Papers: (open to public inspection) None