

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Scrutiny and Overview Committee 5th March 2009
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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Purpose

1. To consult the Scrutiny and Overview Committee on the developing Community Engagement Strategy.

Options

2. The Committee is asked to consider the content at Appendix A and specifically comment upon the emerging actions.

Background

3. In July 2008 the Department of Communities and Local Government published a white paper entitled 'Communities in Control – real people, real power'. This details the introduction of a new duty to promote democracy and to involve local people in decision making, which will come into effect in April 2009.
4. The benefits of involving citizens in local decision making and service provision include¹:
 - strengthening the democratic legitimacy of government and the civic life of the community
 - more efficient and effective services that better reflect the needs of users and have higher levels of customer satisfaction
 - safer communities and a more attractive built environment that meets people's needs
 - strengthening community cohesion.
5. The work of developing a Community Engagement Strategy to facilitate greater democracy and involvement has to date been carried forward by a group of officers who have so far
 - carried out an internal audit of current consultation and engagement processes;
 - held a workshop with officers from different services to clarify that we are all referring to the same thing when we talk about community engagement;
 - agreed an outline of the strategy;
 - developed a draft action plan for the strategy.

¹ 'Creating Strong Safer and Prosperous Communities' Statutory Guidance (July 2008).

Considerations

6. The statutory guidance 'Creating Strong Safer and Prosperous Communities' (July 2008) states that there is already a range of existing requirements such as statutory requirements to inform, consult with or promote the participation of users or citizens, in relation to individual functions (such as spatial planning), and there are also existing non statutory agreements in certain areas (e.g. local compacts with the third sector). The duty to involve does not replace these existing requirements, but rather needs to be considered in addition to them, i.e. authorities need to determine whether the new duty requires any extra actions over and above these more specific requirements. As such, Appendix A has been developed to outline the existing involvement activities of the Council and set out future actions where gaps have been identified.
7. Appendix A is a draft action plan and still requires further work in some service areas, such as Health and Environmental Services where developmental work by the group has been limited to date. Further work is planned.
8. In considering the draft action plan, it is important to note that the statutory guidance states that authorities should consider providing opportunities for *representatives of local persons*² to:
 - **influence or directly participate in decision making** (e.g. in helping to shape local priorities via citizen panels; service advisory panels; neighbourhood management; participatory budgeting; citizen juries)
 - **provide feedback on decisions, services, policies and outcomes** (e.g. 'have your say' section on the authority website; service-user forums; petitions; feedback forms being made available)
 - **co-design/work with the authority in designing policies and services** (e.g. being involved in the commissioning of services)
 - **co-produce/carry out some aspects of services for themselves** (for example having responsibility for the maintenance of a community centre; the transfer of the management of assets; communities taking part in 'street clean up' or environmental conservation work)
 - **work with the authority in assessing services** (e.g. citizens acting as mystery shoppers, user evaluators and as co-opted members of Overview and Scrutiny Committees)
9. A timeline was presented to the Committee in October 2008, however, due to capacity issues it has been necessary to set out a revised timeline:

² In the context of this duty the term "representative" does not refer to formally elected or nominated members of the community. Councillors, and other elected members of the community, have a key role as advocates representing the concerns and wishes of the community. The duty to involve seeks to build on this by increasing the range of opportunities available for citizens to have their say and get involved directly.

Date	Action/s
February 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny to consider draft action plan • EMT to consider draft strategy and action plan
Mid-March 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy and action plan out to public and stakeholder consultation (12-weeks as required by the Cambridgeshire Compact)
Mid-June 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collate consultation responses
End June 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EMT to consider consultation responses
July 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy and action plan presented to Cabinet

The new duty does not require that a Community Engagement Strategy be produced, however, a strategy will assist the authority in providing evidence of compliance.

Implications

10. Financial	The financial implications of delivering the Community Engagement Strategy and action plan are being considered for individual actions. A number of the actions require funding and it has been stated where resources are still being sought.
Legal	The duty to involve comes into being from April 2009.
Staffing	The development and monitoring of the Community Engagement Strategy now sits with the Community and Customer Services area, specifically within the Partnerships Team.
Risk Management	Not developing and implementing a Community Engagement Strategy means that the council is at risk of not fulfilling the duty to involve.
Equal Opportunities	Community Engagement encourages equality by providing the means for all residents to participate in decisions about the services that are being developed and provided for them.

Consultations

11. Consultation has taken place internally with a number of officers who are currently involved in consultation or engagement with different communities in South Cambridgeshire. Subsequently a workshop was held with officers to reach a joint understanding of what is meant by community engagement.
12. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee was consulted on the objectives for the Community Engagement Strategy in October 2008.

Effect on Corporate Objectives and Service Priorities

13. The Strategy will benefit local communities by:
 - Creating a better understanding of the community we serve; and
 - Creating a better understanding of how and why local services need to change and develop.
14. The outcomes will be:
 - Better quality, and responsive and effective services targeting the real needs of individuals and communities;
 - Reduced community inequalities;

- Greater local ownership of Council services;
- Greater participation in the democratic processes;
- Stronger communities;
- Greater job satisfaction for Council staff who see that the services they provide are meeting expressed local needs;
- Improved local reputation; and
- Compliance with the duty to involve.

Options

15. The Committee is asked to consider the content at Appendix A and specifically comment upon the emerging actions.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

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