

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Scrutiny and Overview Committee 2nd October 2008
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Community Development Manager

Community Engagement Strategy for South Cambridgeshire

Purpose

1. To inform the Committee of progress to date on developing a Community Engagement Strategy for South Cambridgeshire and seek input into prioritising objectives for the Community Engagement Strategy.

Background

2. 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. The work of developing a Community Engagement Strategy to facilitate greater democracy and involvement is being 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 broad outline areas to be covered by the strategy.

Considerations

3. **Scope:** The strategy and action plan will potentially cover a wide range of interactions with the public (covering communications, consultation, participation and empowerment). Community engagement already forms a significant element of the Council's activities – for example in relation to:
 - Democratic Services, including the meetings of Scrutiny and Overview Committee in district locations
 - Tenant participation
 - Customer satisfaction surveys and engagement groups such as the Agents' Forum and planned forum of Environmental Health business users
 - Consultation and engagement in relation to planning matters and the growth areas
 - Youth participation initiatives
 - Police Neighbourhood panels
 - Work to support parish plans
4. The strategy will look at the scope for developing these and other potential areas. For example, the achievement of the Council's equalities objectives will require the development of links with appropriate community groups.

5. Size of the strategy

- A short, focussed document is envisaged with succinct points that will keep the strategy clear, readable and user friendly.
- The strategy will be complemented with a detailed action plan that will incorporate current engagement activity as well as new initiatives arising through the service planning process
- A priority for the action plan will be the development of an engagement toolkit.
- The aim is to have all the work complete by March 2009.

6. Proposed subject areas for the Strategy:

- An introduction with background and examples of current activity
- A definition of engagement - one possible definition is: *“An effective working relationship with local people to achieve mutually valued, worthwhile aims. It is an ongoing relationship that involves direct interaction with local people and is far more than simply passing and receiving information”*
- The need for and purpose of an engagement strategy including national aims and objectives as well as local objectives.
- The benefits of involving people in local decision making, together with successful case studies of community engagement.
- Evaluation - how successful we are at involving local people and how we will monitor this?
- Commitments – how, who and when we will engage with our communities in the future

7. Time frame

Date	Actions	Remarks
Oct 2 nd 08	Presentation of draft objectives at Scrutiny and Overview Committee	Scrutiny to discuss objectives of strategy
Oct 08	Community Engagement Strategy to be drafted	Succinct document to be drafted by end of October
Nov 08	Action plan for strategy to be drafted	To incorporate existing community engagement initiatives in SCDC
Dec 08	Draft strategy and action plan submitted to portfolio holder for approval for consultation	
Jan 09	Engagement Strategy workshops for external partners & officers to provide feedback on the strategy & draft action plan.	Wider consultation will take place on the action plan. The strategy will be feedback only.
Jan 09	Paper offered to Scrutiny and Overview Committee for input into action plan	Seeking further input and feedback on the action plan
Jan-Mar09	Action plan will go out for 12 week consultation to adhere to period required by Compact prior to being adopted by SCDC at the end of March	Discussion to take place as to which process for adoption this strategy should take.

8. Implications

Financial	There are financial implications to consulting on and implementing the community engagement strategy. The government has flagged up the requirement for voluntary and community organisations to have greater involvement in the LSP and Cambridgeshire Together has carried out a Partnership Review which is proposing the Cambridgeshire Compact group as the delivery arm for the stronger communities element of the LAA. The potential financial implications will need further consideration as the strategy and action plan are developed in more detail.
Legal	Requirement to comply with government legislation
Staffing	<p>Delivery of the Community Engagement Strategy does have staffing implications although it is envisaged that a majority of it will be through existing resources. Under the re-structure of community services there is a proposal for a Community Liaison Officer who will play a key role in supporting police neighbourhood panels as well as working with Cambridge Council for Voluntary Services to develop a rural network of voluntary and community groups in South Cambridgeshire. Both of these tasks are key to community engagement</p> <p>The Community Services Section will co-ordinate work to take forward the community engagement agenda; however, there will be organisation-wide implications in terms of implementing actions within the agreed strategy and plan.</p>
Risk Management	Not developing and implementing a Community Engagement Strategy means that the council is at risk of not fulfilling its duty to promote participation and democracy.
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

9. 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.

Conclusions/Summary

10. A Community Engagement Strategy is a requirement arising from the Government White Paper "Communities in control – real people, real power".
11. The intention is to keep the strategy as a short, focussed, user-friendly document that will be complimented by an action plan and tool kit.
12. Further opportunities for discussion and feedback on the strategy and action plan are envisaged as part of the process in developing the strategy.

Recommendation

13. The Committee is recommended to note progress to date on developing a Community Engagement Strategy for South Cambridgeshire and contribute to prioritising objectives for the Community Engagement Strategy.

Background Papers: "Communities in control – Real people, real power"
(Government White paper, July 2008)

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