

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet 2 July 2009
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Interim Corporate Manager, Community & Customer Services

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Purpose

1. To recommend the adoption of the Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan.
2. This is a key decision because it is of such significance to a locality, the Council or the services that it provides, that the decision-taker is of the opinion that it should be treated as a key decision and it was first published in the December 2008 Forward Plan.

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 detailed the introduction of a new Duty to Involve local people in decision making, which came into effect in April 2009.
4. The work of developing a Community Engagement Strategy to facilitate greater democracy and involvement was carried forward by a number of officers who:
 - carried out an internal audit of current consultation and engagement processes,
 - held a workshop with officers from different services to define community engagement,
 - consulted the Scrutiny and Overview Committee on the outline strategy and draft action plan,
 - consulted partners including the voluntary and community sector and parish councils on the draft strategy and action plan.
5. The new duty to involve does not require that a Community Engagement Strategy be produced, however, a strategy will assist the authority in providing evidence of compliance.

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, the strategy and action plan has been developed to outline the existing involvement activities of the Council and set out future actions where gaps have been identified.

7. The Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan are included at Appendix A. It is suggested that the Strategy is reviewed annually to ensure that it remains relevant and appropriate and that the Executive Management Team and the Leader's Portfolio Holder Meeting monitor the Action Plan on a six-monthly basis.

Options

8. The Cabinet has the following options:
 - a. To adopt the Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan.
 - b. To request amendments to the Community Engagement Strategy and/or Action Plan prior to adoption.
 - c. To decide not to adopt the Community Engagement Strategy and/or Action Plan and propose an alternative approach to ensuring compliance with the Duty to Involve.

Implications

9. Financial	The financial implications of delivering the Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan are in the main included within existing Service Plans. Where actions require additional funding it has been stated that they will only occur if funds are identified.
Legal	The Duty to Involve was in force from 1 April 2009.
Staffing	The development and monitoring of the Community Engagement Strategy 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. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and will be placed on the Council's website http://www.scambs.gov.uk/CouncilAndDemocracy/Equality/equalityimpactassessments.htm An Initial Assessment found no adverse impacts.

Consultations

10. Consultation has taken place internally with a number of officers, including the Executive Management Team, who are currently involved in consultation or engagement with different communities in South Cambridgeshire. In addition, a workshop was held with officers to reach a joint understanding of what is meant by community engagement.

11. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee was consulted on the objectives for the Community Engagement Strategy in October 2008 and on the draft Action Plan in March 2009.
12. The Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan was widely circulated to partners through a public consultation that was held for 12-weeks in compliance with the Cambridgeshire Compact. A small number of responses were received, which were generally positive, but requested the inclusion of a monitoring and review section be added. This is now included within the strategy.

Effect on Strategic Aims

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.

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.

Recommendation

14. The Cabinet is recommended to adopt the Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan.

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

Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities: Statutory Guidance, HM Government (July 2008)

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