

Community Engagement Strategy

Summary:

Customer Focus is one of the Council's six priorities in the Corporate Plan with stronger Community Engagement being identified in the Corporate Delivery Plan as being key to putting customers at the heart of all that the Council does and to improve access to services.

The Community Engagement Strategy sets out a high-level approach to meeting the statement above. It has been developed from what was considered best practice across a range of Community Engagement Strategies.

The intent of the Strategy is to provide an understanding of what is meant by engagement, a consistent, agreed corporate approach to how engagement is undertaken, and the outcomes used to inform policies, strategies, procedures, service delivery and working with partner organisations.

This report seeks Cabinet approval of the Community Engagement Strategy (appendix A).

Options considered:

1. To adopt the Strategy and action plan.
2. To not adopt the Strategy and continue undertaking community engagement on an as and when basis.

Recommendations:

That Cabinet approve the Community Engagement Strategy.

That Cabinet agree the content of the Action Plan.

Reasons for Recommendations:

To clearly support the Customer Focus element of the Corporate Plan and Corporate Delivery Plan and to set a high-level framework which ensures that engagement is undertaken in a consistent and effective manner; to ensure that people feel well informed about local issues, have opportunities to get involved, influence local decision making, shape their area and allow us to continue to improve services they receive.

The action plan identifies activities which support the transition of the Strategy into delivery of engagement.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AS REQUIRED BY LAW

(Papers relied on to write the report, which do not contain exempt information and which are not published elsewhere)

None	
Cabinet Member (s)	Ward(s) affected All
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1. Introduction

The Council recognises that key to putting residents and customers at the heart of all it does and to improve access to services is through stronger community engagement.

The Council wants to ensure that people feel well informed about local issues, have opportunities to get involved, influence local decision making, shape their area and allow us to continue to improve services they receive.

Community engagement is a powerful tool that can provide invaluable information and help to build confidence within communities but only conducted in a meaningful manner; engagement must always have a purpose and we must be able to demonstrate the impact the responses have had on our decision making.

2. Background

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 introduced a duty on local authorities to involve, inform and consult representatives of local persons where it is appropriate and lawful to do so. The duty came into effect from April 2009.

The “Localism” agenda (The Localism Act 2011) set out in national government policy placed new and greater emphasis on the importance of effective community engagement and the role of local people in decision-making and neighbourhood planning.

This Strategy sets out the high-level approach to meeting the duty of the Council and how we go beyond the “statutory” minimum, building on the already good engagement work undertaken by the Council.

Community Engagement helps the Council to understand different views within our communities. Ensuring that the needs of groups or areas that are harder to reach, or who do not traditionally engage with us are not overlooked is really important; identifying and understanding the barriers that might be stopping certain voices being heard and ultimately increase the number and diversity of people who engage with the Council.

2.1 Development of the Strategy

The Strategy development had arisen from:

- The Council's Corporate Plan Objectives, which provide a 'framework' of priority areas.
- Analysis of Community Engagement Strategies from around the UK to identify examples of best practice.
- Consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

The action plan is a living document which will continue to be added to during the life of the Strategy. The action plan has regard to guidance contained within the Local Government Association "New Conversations" guide to engagement.

2.2 Consultation on the Strategy

A range of stakeholders have been consulted on the draft Strategy. This includes:

- Members.
- Town and Parish Councils.
- Partners through the Health and Wellbeing Partnership.
- North Locality Board.
- Norfolk County Community Safety Partnership (NCCSP).

Consultation responses have been considered and the Strategy has been amended where appropriate and as necessary.

2.3 Options

Option 1 - To adopt the Community Engagement Strategy.

The Community Engagement Strategy sets out what we mean by engagement, why we are committed to engaging and provides a consistent, corporate and agreed approach as to how we engage and use the outcomes to inform our policies, strategies, procedures, service delivery and work with partner organisations. This Strategy clearly supports the Customer Focus priority in the Corporate Plan and the action plan sets out the activities through which the Strategy will be delivered.

Option 2 - Not to progress the Community Engagement Strategy.

The Council already undertakes a wide range of engagement activity and this 'business as usual' activity is usually done well. Failing to adopt the Strategy would not see any diminishment in engagement activity but it would not necessarily be done in a consistent manner, considering best practice and providing confidence to communities in the way that is set out in the Strategy.

To not adopt the Community Engagement Strategy would not support the stated Customer Focus priority in the Corporate Plan.

3. Corporate Plan Objectives

The Community Engagement Strategy supports the Customer Focus priority in the Corporate Plan.

The Customer Focus element of the Delivery Plan includes the following:

We want our customers to be at the heart of everything we do and will strive to improve access to our services further through stronger community engagement, developing more formal mechanisms of inviting customer feedback and comment and, where possible and practical, seek to deliver our services at a more local level through strengthening partnerships with local Town and Parish Councils. The Council will seek further to improve democratic engagement and participation by people of all ages, but particularly through working with schools and colleges to ensure that the voice young people is heard and informs Council decision-making.

The Community Engagement Strategy sets out the high-level approach to meeting this part of the Corporate Plan priority.

4. Medium Term Financial Strategy

There is no direct impact on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

5. Financial and resource implications

There are no direct financial and resource implications arising from the Strategy.

6. Legal implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from the Community Engagement Strategy.

7. Sustainability

There are no sustainability issues arising from this report.

8. Equality and Diversity

There are no equality and diversity issues arising directly from this report. Improving the consistency of approach to community engagement and including communities of interest as a defined area of community should ensure that issues of equality, diversity and inclusion are considered during the development of any community engagement activity.

The aim of the Strategy is to enable a greater engagement with equality groups who may be under represented. Where a negative equality impact is identified action will be taken to mitigate the impact or risk.

9. Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations

There are no direct adverse Crime and Disorder impacts arising from this Strategy.

10. Recommendations

That Cabinet approve the Community Engagement Strategy.

That Cabinet agree the content of the Action Plan.