

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**5 NOVEMBER 2008**

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Cllr Roger Hollingworth - Leader of the Council
Responsible Head of Service	Hugh Bennett – Assistant Chief Executive
Non-Key Decision	

**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 To approve the Council's new Community Engagement Strategy Community Engagement Toolkit and Annual Community Engagement Plan.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the Community Engagement Strategy attached at Appendix 1, Community Engagement Toolkit attached at Appendix 2 and Annual Community Engagement Plan attached at Appendix 3.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Council's existing Consultation Policy and Guidance was developed in September 2007 and agreed at Cabinet in October 2007. Over the course of the past two years the Government's agenda for strengthening the involvement of residents in council business has broadened considerably, going well beyond earlier requirements for councils simply to consult their residents and base their decision making on evidence from such activities. At the heart of the Government's current drive to secure better public services, a stronger public arena and more cohesive communities is the need for effective and meaningful community engagement as outlined in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (developed through the Strong and Prosperous Communities White Paper) and strengthened further in the recent 'Communities in Control' White Paper. This includes such initiatives as participatory budgeting and devolved budgets, as well as a new duty to promote democracy. A clear message is that it is not enough for councils simply to 'consult' any more, although consultation will remain a useful part of the community engagement agenda.
- 3.2 In response to these proposals, it has been considered prudent to develop a Community Engagement Strategy for the District at an early stage, to ensure that expectations are communicated clearly across all departments and to guide senior officers in planning their engagement activities at the

start of the service business planning process and budget cycle for 2009-10. This action has been taken in advance of any duties being enacted and naturally the Strategy will need to be adapted to take account of any future legislation; however, by developing the Strategy now the Council will be well placed to ensure it meets the challenges of the community engagement agenda and is able to prepare for future challenges, particularly with regard to joint working with its partners.

- 3.3 The Council is already taking the challenge of meeting this agenda seriously and has in place a number of mechanisms to engage with communities through PACT meetings, Town Hall LSP meetings, the Equalities and Diversity Forum and Disabled Users' Group. This existing activity is consistent with the Council's vision and values and has been established well in advance of the latest DCLG guidance, therefore providing a solid foundation on which further activities can be developed.
- 3.4 The strategy attached at Appendix 1 sets out the ways in which the Council will engage with its communities across the full range of its activities, to enable us to involve and work with local stakeholders and partners to deliver the shared vision for Bromsgrove District as set out in the Bromsgrove Sustainable Community Strategy and the Council Plan 2008-2011. The strategy builds on and encompasses the 2006 and 2007 Consultation Policy and Guidance and the Statement of Community Involvement (2006) that underpins the Local Development Framework. A toolkit for officers on the steps to take in planning and executing community engagement activities is attached at Appendix 2 and the planned community engagement activities for 2008-09 (taken from current service business plans) is also attached at Appendix 3.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the Community Engagement Strategy, however Heads of Service and senior officers will need to ensure that appropriate community engagement activities (developed in line with this strategy and toolkit) are included in the service business plans currently being developed for the 2009-10 financial year. Accordingly, sufficient resources will also need to be allocated to allow for such activities.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Elements of the Government's community engagement agenda are covered by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The agenda is likely to be strengthened with further legislation around the proposed duty to promote democracy and other recommendations in the 'Communities in Control' White Paper.

#### **6. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES**

6.1 The Community Engagement Strategy links directly to Council's 'Sense of Community' priority by providing a framework for future community engagement activity across the District.

## 7. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

7.1 The main risks associated with the details included in this report are:

- Failure to deliver against central government's community engagement agenda and meet legislative requirements, where imposed.
- Failure to engage the community, leading to a decline in democratic participation (such as reduced electoral turnout) and a negative impact on the Council's reputation.
- Lack of evidence for Members to base their decisions on.

7.2 These risks are being managed as follows:

- Failure to deliver against central government's community engagement agenda and meet legislative requirements, where imposed:

Risk Register: *Corporate*

Key Objective Ref No: 13

Key Objective: *Effective two tier working and Community Engagement*

- Failure to engage the community, leading to a decline in democratic participation (such as reduced electoral turnout) and a negative impact on the Council's reputation:

Risk Register: *Corporate*

Key Objective Ref No: 13

Key Objective: *Effective two tier working and Community Engagement*

- Lack of evidence for Members to base their decisions on:

Risk Register: *Corporate Communications, Policy and Performance*

Key Objective Ref No: *CCPP12*

Key Objective: *Deliver the Council's Consultation Strategy*

## 8. **CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 Implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy will have a direct impact on customers due to the emphasis on increasing the range and frequency of activities that enable customers to become more involved in Council business. The Strategy intends that customers will have more of a say on issues that affect their communities and will therefore have increased contact with the Council. This should complement existing work around communications, customer access and complaints, as well as future work to look at the need for customer profiling.

## 9. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Existing consultation structures through the E&D Forum and Disabled Users' Group will continue to be supported by the Community Engagement Strategy, and new channels will be explored to improve engagement with lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender groups and migrant communities.

## 10. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There may be opportunities for joint working with partners and neighbouring authorities through, for example, the development of a countywide customer panel and consolidation of existing mechanisms. Effective community engagement guides resources towards the things residents value the most, thereby creating value for money.

## 11. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Procurement Issues None
Personnel Implications None
Governance/Performance Management None
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime and Disorder Act 1998 None
Policy Introduction of a new Community Engagement Strategy for the Council
Environmental None

## 12. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	<b>At Leader's Group</b>
Chief Executive	<b>Yes</b>
Executive Director - Partnerships and Projects	<b>Yes</b>
Executive Director - Services	<b>Yes</b>
Assistant Chief Executive	<b>Yes</b>
Head of Service	<b>Yes</b>
Head of Financial Services	<b>Yes</b>

Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	<b>Yes</b>
Head of Organisational Development & HR	<b>Yes</b>
Corporate Procurement Team	<b>No</b>

**13. WARDS AFFECTED**

All Wards

**14. APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Community Engagement Strategy  
Appendix 2 Community Engagement Toolkit  
Appendix 3 Annual Community Engagement Plan

**15. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

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