

REPORT TO: CABINET

DATE: 24 MARCH 2022

TITLE: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR JOEL CHARLES, DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

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This is a Key Decision
It is on the Forward Plan as Decision Number I012876
Call-in Procedures may apply
This decision will affect no ward specifically.

RECOMMENDED that:

- A** Cabinet approves the draft Community Engagement Strategy 2022/23 – 2024/25, subject to consultation, in order to support a renewed, strengthened and joined up approach to engagement across all council services and functions to ensure our work is as inclusive and effective as possible by reaching people from all social, financial and ethnic backgrounds in a variety of different ways.
- B** Cabinet authorises that consultation be undertaken on this draft for a period of six weeks. Minor amendments will be submitted to the Director of Communities and Environment who will, in conjunction with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Business and Community Resilience, develop the final version of the strategy following the conclusion of the consultation period.

REASON FOR DECISION

- A** Implementation of the strategy will inform the Council's work with residents, partners, businesses and the community and voluntary sector to ensure an inclusive engagement approach in order that the council and its partners may better understand the needs of our communities, in particular those that are vulnerable or from groups with identified unmet need. Such an approach will help build cohesive and involved communities where people feel and are involved in local decision making and the co-production of services to meet their needs and those of the town more widely.

BACKGROUND

1. The council's previous Community Engagement Strategy expired in 2021. This new strategy sets out how the council will work proactively with residents and businesses to strengthen its approach to inclusive engagement across all of its services and functions.
2. This strategy, supported by a robust and fluid action plan, sets out the council's intentions for future engagement activity and will act as a framework for inclusive engagement to ensure everyone has the opportunity to feel and be involved, included and listened to.
3. An inclusive community engagement approach recognises that everyone has a role to play in public engagement. Our approach will provide all people from all backgrounds with opportunities to participate by reducing barriers, creating connections and engaging in meaningful and supportive ways.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

4. Especially after the arrival of the pandemic, it is clear that in its role as community leader the council needs to better understand the needs of the town's ever growing, rapidly changing and diverse community so that with our partners we can respond appropriately through delivery of the right services, at the right time and in the right place.
5. Through renewed and strengthened community engagement and honest two way conversations with residents and businesses we will be able to know and understand our communities better and work together to identify and tackle inequality and drive forward the council's commitment to social inclusion, community-led action and co-creation of services to meet local identified need.
6. Past community engagement activity has not been joined up effectively across all council services nor has it been embedded successfully in to everything that we do. This new strategy will drive culture change across the organisation to ensure that all services achieve increased levels of meaningful engagement and as a result can better understand the needs of our community.
7. A key element of this strategy will be to undertake a communications review to ensure that we are ready and equipped to engage with all people at all levels, especially those that are vulnerable or from minority groups, in a range of ways and through a variety of mediums to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to be involved, have their say and be listened to.
8. The Community Engagement Strategy should be viewed as a strategy that will support all elements of the town's post COVID-19 recovery and the council's onward journey to achieving good health and wellbeing, social and economic growth and prosperity and opportunities for all regardless of background. The strategy will be inextricably linked to other council strategies including Community Resilience, Community Safety, Health and Wellbeing and The Town Plan for example.

9. Implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy and its associated action plan will be reviewed and monitored quarterly and progress reported to the Senior Management Board (SMB) and Director for Communities and Environment.
10. The draft Community Engagement Strategy 2022/23 – 2024/25 is set out at Appendix A to the report.

IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Growth and Regeneration

The Community Engagement Strategy will also complement the recently adopted Statement of Community Involvement which sets out how the Council will interact with residents in the Planning process. The new Community Engagement Strategy will also set a framework for the way in which the Council will engage with the wider community on the development and implementation of Regeneration programme.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration

Finance

None specific.

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Housing

As outlined in the report.

Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing

Communities and Environment

As contained in the report.

Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment

Governance and Corporate Support

As contained in the report.

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Support

Appendices

Appendix A - Draft Community Engagement Strategy 2022/23 - 2024/25

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.