

Community Engagement Strategy Action Plan Review

Cabinet Member Cllr Colin Slade
Responsible Officer Liz Reeves, Head of Customer Services and ICT

Reason for Report: To update Members on progress made with the Community Engagement Action Plan (2015-17).

RECOMMENDATION(S):

1. That the work taking place to engage with a wide range of Mid Devon residents and stakeholders is noted.
2. That Members note and agree the revised action plan and timetable for review of the Community Engagement Strategy.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: Community Engagement supports the aims of the Corporate Plan by ensuring we understand the views of our community, that includes citizens, businesses and other stakeholders and are using this information to provide services that meet our current and future needs.

Financial Implications: Community engagement activities need to be budgeted into service plans.

Legal Implications: The Council has a 'Duty to Consult' (Local Government Act 1999) its residents, customers, and stakeholders under relevant legislation. Meaningful engagement will reduce disruptive legal challenge advised by the Best Value Statutory Guidance 2011.

Risk Assessment: Not engaging with residents in an appropriate way may result in services that do not meet the needs of residents, damage the reputation of the Council and may lead to legal challenge.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council has focused on providing good quality services while continually reducing budgets and identifying savings. The Council has a duty to consult and engage effectively with residents, partners, employees and other stakeholders when deciding about service changes, particularly at a time of service cuts. Changes to policy or services that impact a particular stakeholder are to be engaged early in the process to ensure we meet the needs of our users.
- 1.2 As a council we must offer value for money and customer satisfaction, therefore engagement is an essential part of a service review in order to meet this criteria.
- 1.3 Within the Council there are a number of good and innovative examples of consultation and community involvement. We wish to continue to engage and to work more closely with the communities we serve, our partners and other organisations (such as the voluntary sector, health, police, fire and other agencies) to develop services.

1.4 However, as a council we are:

- Required to make significant savings and to make tough choices about service priorities.
- Look at the way services are delivered and ensure best value.
- Respond to the increasing demands of an ageing population.
- Provide digital access channels.
- Respond to the effects of welfare reform and the impact it is having on low income families.
- Seek to meet the challenges of changing national policy.
- Respond to the calls for greater transparency and localism.

1.5 To ensure we are using resources effectively, the level of engagement should be proportionate to the impact it will have on the community, and help to inform changes or implementation of new service provision.

2.0 **What we have achieved, 2015-2017**

2.1 Over the last two years, we have continued to engage with residents. Consultation and community engagement is now embedded in all service areas and for many services is part of the “day job”, plus details of consultation and engagement activities are included in business/service plans. (Please see Appendix A for examples of consultation and engagement with community groups that have been carried out during the period 2015-17).

2.2 Services are identifying the need for consultations earlier and therefore able to plan / use the appropriate method for the topic and target audience from street to online surveys, focus groups, exit interviews and forums (e.g. for businesses, equality groups and landlords).

2.3 The Council has also been committed to maintaining and extending the range of communication channels available. In addition to traditional contact channels, phone, in person, in writing and email, we also engage on our website, Facebook and Twitter. A new website was developed that allows web pages to fit tablets and smartphone screens making it easier to view and transact with us regardless of the device used.

2.4 We continued to consult using the citizens’ panel in 2015. Topics covered were Devon Health Watch, Older People’s Strategy, Elections and Your Local Market. In 2016 one survey went out covering the Corporate Plan and Communications, however, with reduced resource less topics were put forward to consult on. In addition, the method of consultation was labour intensive in staff time preparing and recording responses, printing and postage costs.

2.5 Members of the citizens’ panel sign up for 3 years and the latest term finished in December 2016. Over the years the number of residents taking part decreased quite dramatically, therefore the last 5 to 6 surveys were not as statistically valid as previous surveys. Management Team agreed that alternative channels should be used to engage residents, and where possible, engagement online instead of

printing paper surveys should be used. Therefore it was agreed that we should stop using the citizens' panel in its current form.

- 2.6 To replace the citizens' panel in 2017 we are implementing "Gov.delivery" which is a simple means of customer engagement with the Council via our website. This enables individuals to receive updates on services they are interested in, receive newsletters and take part in consultations. This, in addition with the planned consultation and engagement activities identified in service plans, will ensure that we continue to listen to our citizens and get their views on service delivery.
- 2.5 Business transformation continues to ensure we develop systems that are able to offer a range of methods to engage and make it easier for customers to contact or comment about our services.

3.0 Community Engagement Strategy

- 3.1 The community engagement strategy 2013-2016 is due for review. To reflect and support changes still to be made to the corporate structure, this strategy review has been delayed.
- 3.2 The Action plan for 2017-18 has been updated to ensure the good work currently planned continues and can be monitored (see Appendix B). Additional consultations may be identified during the year to respond to any changes in service provision.
- 3.2 The Communications Action Plan for 2017-18 is also due for review in March and will incorporate the Community Engagement Action Plan, to avoid duplication and make best use of resource.

4.0 Summary

- 4.1 Community engagement will continue throughout 2017-18, this will reflect the Council's need to:
- Engage with the relevant stakeholder over a service or policy change and identify the level of involvement required in proportion to the impact.
 - Involve residents in designing services to meet changing needs.
 - Improve the range of information available to residents and the methods we use.
 - Only consult if the results will be influential.
 - Conduct meaningful engagement that will reduce disruptive legal challenge.

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Background Papers: CWB report 24.3.2015

Circulation of the Report: Leadership team, Cllr Colin Slade.

Service	Consultation 2015-2017
Waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town and Parish consultation on street sweeping, footway cleansing, litter bins and dog bins • Devon wide consultation on street cleaning • Trial on new recycling service and implementation of chargeable garden waste service
Street Scene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation on parking order charges 2016
Housing Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devon wide consultation on proposed changes to Council Tax Reduction Scheme • Welfare Support, including landlord forums, engagement with voluntary sector groups
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant Involvement Activities – housing have been shortlisted for an award for this work, which includes:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased use of social media to engage with tenants - tenants together scrutiny group - “getting to know you” forms - Provision of an annual report - Action plan for future events/activities
Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultations completed on Newcombes Meadow play area refurbishment and Amory Park • Consultation with the town and parish councils in relation to grass cutting, public toilets and other buildings
Customer Services September 2015 – March 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crediton office closure March 2016 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meetings and written updates with the Town and Parish Councils, updates in WIS - Public information leaflets - Work was carried out with all services to ensure customers were informed of changes to service provision
Development Control and Forward planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During 2016, the Statement of Community Consultation setting out how we consult with the community on planning matters was reviewed, consulted upon and updated • A range of public consultations have been run in relation to the Local Plan Review and other planning policy related matters: the master-planning of NW Cullompton urban extension, the production of Supplementary Planning Documents and the design guide for Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Planning Service also consult on planning applications in accordance with the Statement of Community consultation: publicise all planning applications by means of a site notice posted on or near the proposal site, notify in writing the occupiers of properties that share a boundary site with the application site (further neighbour notifications may be sent according to the officer's assessment) and all applications are advertised weekly in the local press and on our website. The public have opportunity to attend and speak at planning committee. • Town and Parish Councils are a statutory consultee on planning applications and are able to attend and address any meeting of Planning Committee.
Leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer engagement groups at all sites, promoting opportunity for customers to give feedback from their peers, and act as a sounding board for new leisure initiatives • Liaison with local GPs to relaunch the Active Start scheme • Liaison with disability access specialists regarding facility access and car parking at Lords Meadow • Customer survey for Christmas and bank holiday opening hours • Liaised with Community PDG and elected Members regarding pricing strategy, developments and investments. Such as; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rebranding of leisure literature to simplify information and pricing - Launching new leisure website to improve accessibility and information
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensing consult with Town and Parish Councils on a range of issues, in 2016 consultation on the re-adoption of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 was carried out. Consultation with Town, Parish, general public and industry sector was also carried out on adoption of fees and charges for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire (HC & PH) in 2015 • Licensing consult on applications with the community on a daily basis in a variety of ways, such as site notices and on our website, plus direct consultation with other responsible statutory authorities. • Environmental Health consulted with a number of statutory bodies in respect of applications received for permitted installations under Environmental Permitting requirements

Community Engagement Action Plan

Action	Timescale	Responsible Officer
Ensure surveys are carried out each year as detailed in Business Plans.	2017-18	Service Managers
Ensure Customer Services are aware of all consultations and can assist as appropriate ie with completion, encouraging take up, signposting etc.	2017-18	Service Managers
Engage equality groups / voluntary sector appropriately in Council consultations on all major projects or changes to service delivery.	2017-18	Service Managers
Build relationships with the business sector <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate Mid Devon Business Forum Strategic Employers Programme Co-ordinate a Business Rates Consultative Group 	Bi – monthly on-going Feb 2017	Economic Dev Manager Director of Finance
Promote dialogue with Town and Parish Councils <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review parish charter Provide two meetings at Phoenix House 	monthly on-going 2017-18	Member Services
Widely publicise consultations and community engagement activity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a variety of communication channels e.g. Facebook, Newscentre, Twitter, to publicise current consultations Use WIS to inform members of consultations Use Gov.delivery to send newsletters and updates on service changes. 	on-going 2017-18	Service Managers Communications Officer Service Managers Web contributors
Provide feedback after all consultations, update the website, use a “you said we did” model. Use social media and Gov.delivery to publicise the outcome of consultations.	on –going 2017-18	Service Managers Communications Officer Web contributors
Implement Gov.delivery to engage with a wider audience over the website, and enabling citizens to choose the information they receive.	project started April 2017	Head of Customer Services