

To: City Executive Board

Date: 11th December 2013

Report of: Head of Policy, Culture and Communications.

Title of Report: Community Engagement Plan (2014 – 2017) – Draft for Consultation.

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To seek approval from the City Executive Board to consult with the public on the Draft Community Engagement Plan 2014 -17.

Key decision? No

Executive lead member: Cllr Steve Curran, Executive Board Member, Youth and Communities

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan, Strong Active Communities

Recommendations:

To comment on the Draft Community Engagement Plan 2014 -2017

To approve the Draft Community Engagement Plan 2014 -2017, subject to any specified amendments, for public consultation.

Appendix 1: Draft Community Engagement Plan 2014 – 17

Appendix 2: Community Engagement Toolkit

Appendix 3: Draft Community Engagement Plan – Consultation Project Brief

Appendix 4: Risk Assessment

Appendix 5: Equality Impact Assessment Screening

Introduction

1. Oxford City Council has a long track record of working with local people to build strong and active communities, and its commitment to community engagement predates, outlives and goes much further than legislative requirements.
2. The purpose of this new Community Engagement Plan is to provide a framework for how the Council engages with its residents and communities to develop a greater understanding of their needs, and to increase the level and quality of involvement in the decisions that affect their lives.
3. This framework includes:
 - a. an analysis of how demographic and technological factors impact community engagement;
 - b. the principles underpinning the Council's community engagement activities; and
 - c. methods of community engagement.
4. Using this framework the Plan presents the different activities involved in community engagement, the purpose of these activities, progress to date on their implementation and our plans for the future.
5. This plan does not address the ways in which we engage residents and service users in improving specific Council services (they are covered by other strategies); nor does it address consultation on planning applications.

Development of the strategy

6. The Community Engagement Plan supports the Council's Stronger Communities priority as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2013-17. It references principles and methodologies that were included in the Council's Consultation Strategy and Toolkit 2010-2013, and it takes account of the significant developments that have occurred in neighbourhood working.
7. Benchmarking was carried out across nine local authorities, which informed the content of this Plan and re-affirmed the use of the ladder of participation as a key component of the framework.
8. The Community Engagement Plan has been developed by Consultation Officers and the Communities and Neighbourhoods Manager, with input from service areas' Consultation Officers, and the Lead Member for Youth and Communities.

Key Elements of the Framework

9. Using data from the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010 and Census 2011, the Community Engagement Plan includes an analysis of demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the residents of Oxford together with developments in the use of technology. This helps us to understand the community that we want to engage.
10. The principles of community engagement include inclusiveness and accountability, as well continuous improvement and value for money aspirations. The principles will drive our improvement plans and will be used to measure the success of this Plan.
11. Oxford City Council's Community Engagement Plan is based on the widely accepted 'ladder of participation' model, which shows an increasing level of community involvement as one "moves up" the five rungs of the ladder. Recognising that one size does not necessarily fit all, the Plan presents a model that can be used to segment and target the community using the most cost effective method.
12. The Plan describes the Council's community engagement practices using the ladder of participation: informing, researching, consulting, collaborating and empowering. From a decision making perspective most of the activities are focussed on the middle rungs, reflecting the Council's position: decision-making is neither wholly centralised, nor wholly devolved.

Managing and Monitoring

13. An action plan is being written in parallel with the development of the Community Engagement Plan. This will be prioritised and incorporated into Service Plans for Policy Culture and Communications and Leisure, Parks and Communities, and will be managed through routine processes. The action plan will be presented alongside the proposed Plan at the City Executive Board in March 2014.
14. Key success indicators of the Community Engagement Plan will be developed, based on principles such as, but not limited to, inclusiveness and accessibility. The key success indicators will be presented alongside the proposed Plan at the City Executive Board in March 2014.

Consultation Plan

15. The draft Community Engagement Plan will be put out for public feedback via the Council's eConsult system from 12th December 2013 until 23rd January 2014. Stakeholder groups will be notified and will be able to request paper copies if required. See Appendix 3 Public Involvement Brief for more details.
16. The Autumn 2013 Talkback Panel survey will seek views on methods of informing residents.

Level of Risk

17. See Appendix 4 for the Risk Register.

Climate Change/ environmental impact

18. The Community Engagement Plan offers an opportunity for the City Council to reduce its carbon footprint and consumption of paper by encouraging the use of digital technologies.
19. It is recognised that this needs to be balanced with our principles of inclusiveness and accessibility, which will require that some people will require non-digital methods of engagement.

Equalities impact

20. The Community Engagement Plan is based upon our principles of engagement, which includes inclusiveness. This is defined as: "the participation of all stakeholders who have an interest in or who would be affected by a specific decision, including groups that are sometimes difficult to engage such as young people, older people, minority groups, and people with disabilities".
21. See Appendix 5 for the Initial Equalities Impact Assessment.

Financial Implications

22. There are no immediate direct financial implications of the Community Engagement Plan as it reflects programmes that are funded within existing budgets. Same applies to the consultation activity.

Legal Implications

23. While there is not a statutory requirement to have a community engagement strategy, there is new guidance from the Cabinet Office on Consultation Principles. Local Authorities should adopt those principles to engage stakeholders in policy and legislative developments. The Guidance is intended to improve the way public bodies consult by emphasising a more "proportionate and targeted" approach, so that the type and scale of engagement is proportionate to the potential impacts of the proposal under consideration.

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