

To: Council

Date: 29th September 2014

Report of: Head of Policy, Culture and Communications.

Title of Report: Draft Community Engagement Policy Statement 2014 – 17.

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To seek approval from Council to adopt the draft Community Engagement Policy Statement 2014 – 17 recommended by the City Executive Board on 3rd July 2014. This replaces the Consultation Strategy 2010 – 13 as part of the Policy Framework.

Key decision? No

Executive lead member: Councillor Christine Simm, Executive Board Member, Culture and Communities

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan, Strong Active Communities

Recommendation: Council is recommended to approve the draft Community Engagement Policy Statement 2014 – 17 for adoption within the Policy Framework.

Appendix 1: Draft Community Engagement Policy Statement 2014 – 17

Appendix 2: Consultation Results – draft Community Engagement Plan

Appendix 3: Risk Register

Appendix 4: Equalities Impact Assessment Screening

Appendix 5: Consultation Toolkit 2014

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 the new Community Engagement Policy Statement 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. The policy statement includes:
 - an analysis of how demographic and technological factors impact community engagement;
 - the principles that underpin the Council's community engagement activities; and
 - the Council's methods of community engagement, including the role of Councillors.
4. As an overarching principle, the City Council believes that services must be delivered within a framework of standards where people have access to high quality services regardless of where they live.
5. Using a re-purposed set of principles of community engagement the policy statement describes how the different forms of community engagement activities relate to the principles. The principles are: flexibility, proportionality, transparency and clarity, timeliness, feedback and inclusiveness and accessibility.

Development of the policy statement

6. The new Community Engagement Policy Statement develops the "Engaging Our Communities" themes already set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2014-18. 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. Principles of consultation and community engagement were drawn from sources including the Cabinet Office, where they were used to help re-define the principles contained in the revised draft policy statement.
8. The Community Engagement Policy Statement has been developed with Consultation Officers and the Communities and Neighbourhoods Manager, with input from service areas' Consultation Officers, and the Lead Member for Youth and Communities.

9. Public consultation was carried out from 20th December 2013 to 31st March 2014. Over 1300 invitations were sent to residents who have registered an interest in community consultations, as well as leaders of Residents' Groups and minority ethnic groups. 48 individual and three group submissions were received. The full results of consultation can be found in Appendix 2.
10. High level responses from the consultation show that:
- 89% of responders agree or strongly agree with the principles.
 - 100% wanted to be involved in decision making through a variety of methods, but the main barriers to participation were lack of time, lack of information, and concern that feedback was not being taken seriously.
 - People want to be more engaged in planning and housing decisions, in addition to a broader range of topics
 - The majority of responders want to see the more commitment to the principles of engagement reflected in the Community Engagement Policy Statement, such as accountability and inclusiveness.

The Policy Statement

The policy statement includes the following elements:

- Understanding communities
- Principles of community engagement
- Flexibility and proportionality
- Transparency and clarity
- Timeliness
- Feedback
- Inclusivity and accessibility
- The way forward

Managing and Monitoring

11. In parallel with the development of the Community Engagement Policy Statement, actions planning has been completed and incorporated into Service Plans for Policy Culture and Communications and Leisure, Parks and Communities, and will be managed through routine performance management processes.
12. Key success indicators for the Community Engagement Policy Statement have been developed. A formal Service Area performance measure tracks feedback on consultation activities, with targets set for the length of time to publish consultation results. In addition inclusiveness is monitored wherever the demographic information is available.

13. The policy statement will be reviewed once per year to ensure that it is still current.

Level of Risk

14. See Appendix 3 for the Risk Register.

Climate Change/ environmental impact

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

Equalities impact

17. The Community Engagement Policy Statement is based upon our principles of engagement, which includes inclusiveness and accessibility. 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".
18. See Appendix 4 for the Initial Equalities Impact Assessment.

Financial Implications

19. There are no immediate direct financial implications of the Community Engagement Policy Statement as it reflects programmes that are funded within existing budgets.

Legal Implications

20. While there is not a statutory requirement to have a community engagement policy statement, 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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