

Appendix 1

Cherwell District Council

Consultation and Engagement Strategy

2016 - 2019

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1. Aim of Strategy

The Consultation and Engagement Strategy will form the basis for a medium term action plan to guide the specific consultation and engagement activity undertaken by the council during the period 2016 - 2019.

Services will be expected to use this strategy when undertaking service-specific consultation and engagement exercises and apply the principles when they work with residents, communities, businesses and customers.

The Performance and Insight Team will deliver this strategy and apply the principles to all generic engagement and consultation exercises (e.g. the council-wide customer satisfaction survey) as well as providing support and advice for any service specific consultation and engagement activity that is proposed and carried out.

2. Context

The council is keen to enhance performance by ensuring we understand what people want and that people understand what we do. This will be supported through effective communication and engagement with communities. CDC already has strong links with the local community and voluntary sector as well as other public service providers and recognises the importance of ensuring consultation and engagement includes these organisations.

The “Localism” agenda (The Localism Act 2011) set out in national government policy placed new and greater emphasis on the importance of effective community engagement and the role of local people in decision making and neighbourhood planning. The council is also committed to working with partners where it benefits local communities because ‘joined up’ engagement can help both the public and the council to address local problems that cut across agencies.

The strategy outlines our developing approach and commitment to consultation with residents, communities and customers. It does not replace any statutory or formal consultation processes that we currently undertake, for example in relation to

planning, licensing or any appeals processes.

In preparation for the council's Local Plan, there is a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which provides the consultation strategy for the Local Plan. The SCI sets out the framework for planning-related consultations which will ensure there is genuine involvement in plan and decision making. It also enables the council to demonstrate how they have met statutory requirements. The SCI is a requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended). The SCI needs to comply with statutory requirements and Government policy for plan making and consultation on planning matters.

The council also incorporates the Equality Act into its consultation and engagement work. The Equality Act came into force on 6 April 2010 with many of its provisions coming into effect in October 2010. The intention of the Act is to harmonize the fragmented discrimination legislation but it also introduced new restrictions.

Existing good practice (e.g. 'Connecting Communities' events for the public, 'Knowing our Communities' information sharing events for officers and members, etc.) will form the basis of our consultation and engagement work going forward, enabling us to replicate successes and learn from any issues that have previously arisen.

3. Applying the strategy

The key objective of this strategy is to capture and use relevant and meaningful insight from a wide range of stakeholders on how they use and/or perceive our services, what changes they would like to see and where there is scope to provide improved or additional services.

Under-pinning the objective are clear aims to:

1. Demonstrate a clear commitment to consultation and community engagement
2. Have a coordinated but flexible approach to consultation that meets the needs of all our services and ensures a consistent approach across the council
3. Work in partnership with others where appropriate to ensure effective consultation
4. Undertake consultation in line with clear standards and good practice
5. Ensure our consultation and engagement is open, accessible and inclusive

3.1 How we will engage and consult

The council is determined to move away from consultation that speaks about "hard to reach groups" and to ensure our consultative approach is inclusive to all and effective in gathering feedback that can help drive service improvement.

Engagement with local people is vital. Engagement is part of the process of actively involving people in the delivery and development of services. When engaging with residents, community, business and customers, all services should follow these distinct principles for effective engagement.

Informing	This involves raising awareness about the subject by providing relevant, balanced, clear and easily understood information. We will also ensure that people are kept up to date.
Consulting	This means asking what people think and inviting comment on proposals and approaches.
Participating	This entails a more interactive approach of encouraging people to put forward views, ideas and proposals for discussion.
Giving Feedback	This is the stage of the process where people can see how their involvement has informed decision making.

3.2 Methods of consultation and engagement

The types and methods of engagement used will be proportionate and appropriate to the nature and subject matter with a much greater emphasis on partnership working. Potential techniques that could be used include:

Connecting Community events

The public will be invited to attend open events that will provide the opportunity for relevant services to showcase what they can deliver alongside the services provided by connected agencies (Police, NHS, Education, etc.), the Town/Parish and County Councils and voluntary groups.

After each event an evaluation will be made of how it impacted upon the community and what we can learn to improve our service and overall satisfaction of residents of both councils.

The existing **Faith Forum** and **Disability Forum** of CDC will form part of a Connecting Community event but with a direct focus on those areas to ensure that the focus is driven from those with a direct need or understanding of the service area.

Links with other Council and District forums

There are existing forums to which the Consultation and Engagement Officer attends to ensure the opportunities to engage are taken forward. It will be good practice to ensure that the existing forums review their terms of reference and validity of function. Where opportunities existing to ‘piggyback’ on connected forums then the possibility will be explored in order to share resources and link them with Connecting Communities events.

Presentations and Attendance at Meetings

Where appropriate (and by arrangement) the council may deliver presentations, hold question and answer sessions or attend meetings of external groups and organisations, in order to consult or engage upon particular issues.

Public Exhibitions and Meetings

Where appropriate, the council may hold exhibitions, with staffed or unstaffed drop-in

sessions, to help inform the community, or hold public meetings to allow people to debate particular issues.

Annual Satisfaction Survey

The council conducts an annual Customer Satisfaction Survey. The Customer Satisfaction Survey will cover overall satisfaction, satisfaction with individual services, value for money, communications and the ability to measure performance year on year. The Survey is sent both electronically and in paper form to capture feedback from as many residents as possible.

Targeted Surveys

The council can use online surveys via Survey Monkey to contact residents either in targeted groups or as a percentage of all on the Land Registry database. The Performance and Insight team can assist services in setting up online surveys as well as providing guidance on question setting.

Targeted surveys can also be set up for postal or telephone contact or indeed gathering information face to face. The method of delivery for a targeted survey will depend on the requirements of the residents, community or customers being asked and also with whom the service needs to consult and engage.

For example, a targeted survey asking users of a leisure centre for their opinions and improvement decisions could be carried out by specifically targeting people at the leisure centre by giving them a survey/return envelope or link to an online survey as they leave the centre, ensuring we are only getting the views of people who will be able to feedback on the facilities on offer.

Internal Staff Surveys

The council will continue to look inwards to consider the views of staff with staff surveys conducted across both sites in a two year rolling programme. The last survey was conducted in early 2016.

Town/Parish Councils and other existing community forums

Where appropriate, the council may utilise Town/Parish Council meetings, as well as other existing community forums or local liaison groups, to raise awareness of new services or to hold consultations regarding access to services.

Workshops/Focus Groups

Where appropriate, the council will hold workshops or meetings with key stakeholders to discuss particular issues and key technical matters in depth.

Knowing our communities

The 'knowing our communities' events will be used as a mechanism to share information with the staff. A programme of new topics will be provided in line with the Equalities Action Plan. It is aimed to link these 'knowing our communities' staff

briefings to the appraisal and personal development plans as a way to encourage greater staff uptake of the events.

3.4 Communications

Council publications

The council publishes a quarterly newsletter which is delivered to all households across the district. This newsletter will publicise the community engagement events.

Email/Letters

The council will email/send letters to those who are on our consultation database who have requested to be consulted or engage within forums.

Internet and Social Media

The council will seek to publicise the public community engagements on its website and will raise awareness of consultations and engagement through social media such as Twitter and Facebook.

Local Media

The council will prepare press releases to circulate to local newspapers and/or radio stations to raise awareness of the consultations and engagement to encourage community involvement.

4. Consultation & Engagement – Annual Action Plans & using the data

4.1 Action Plans

Each year the Action Plan to implement the Consultation Strategy will be refreshed to take into account any new developments and respond to lessons learned from the previous year. The Action Plan aligns activity to the 5 aims and also will support the Corporate Business Plan for the council.

4.2 Using the data collected

All information collected through engagement and consultation activities will be treated appropriately to conform with data protection legislation. The information will be used to help:

- a) Evidence satisfaction with the council's services.
- b) Show progress over time, particularly when gauging improvement in service delivery.
- c) Capture ideas from residents, communities and customers that will help the council with service design and resource allocation.
- d) Identify concerns that need investigation and resolution.

5. Contact details

For information about planned consultation and engagement events please contact the Performance and Insight Team

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