

**Appendix 1**

# Cherwell District Council

## Consultation and Engagement Strategy

2017 - 2020

## Contents

1. Aim of Strategy .....	2
2. Context .....	3
3. Applying the strategy .....	4
3.1 How we will engage and consult .....	4
3.2 Methods of consultation and engagement .....	8
4. Consultation & Engagement – Annual Action Plans & using the data .....	9
4.1 Action Plans .....	9
4.2 Using the data collected .....	9
5. Contact details .....	9

### 1. Aim of Strategy

The Consultation and Engagement Strategy will outline the principles for consultation and engagement for the council, enabling us to continue to improve service delivery by collecting focused and meaningful feedback from residents, communities and customers.

The strategy will provide the council with a consistent, corporate and agreed approach to how we consult and use the results to inform our policies, strategies and service delivery.

This Strategy will be used as the basis for a medium term action plan to guide the specific consultation and engagement activity undertaken by the council during the period 2017 - 2020.

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

The Strategic Intelligence and Insight and Community Services teams will deliver this strategy and apply the principles to all generic engagement and consultation exercises (e.g. the council-wide residents' satisfaction survey) as well as providing support and advice for all service-specific consultation and engagement activity that is proposed and carried out.

This strategy will work towards ensuring consultation results are available earlier for the annual business planning process, budget setting process and service planning process. The SII team will work alongside services to strive for increased online response rates through completion of surveys, and running alongside this a timetable of service-specific 'deeper dive' customer satisfaction approach. The resulting effect for the Council will be to have access to a richer pool of customers' satisfaction evidence linking to all areas of the council and being pulled together in one place.

## 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 harmonise the fragmented discrimination legislation but it also introduced new restrictions.

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

### 3. Applying the strategy

The key objectives of the strategy are:

- 1. Have a clear commitment to consultation and community engagement with a coordinated but flexible approach that provides insight into improving business delivery.**
- 2. Show how the results of our consultation identify issues, influence outcomes and help improve performance delivery.**

Underpinning 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 to ensure joined up consultation and engagement
4. Undertake consultation in line with clear standards and good practice
5. Ensure our consultation and engagement is open, accessible and inclusive
6. Demonstrate how the results of our consultation influence outcomes via service delivery

#### 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, all services should:

- a) Ensure they listen and respond to resident, community and customer needs
- b) Follow the principles for effective engagement

The council recognises that the community involvement process has the following distinct principles:

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 service delivery, proposals and approaches.
Participating	This entails a more interactive approach of encouraging people to put forward views, ideas and proposals for discussion using a variety of consultation methods.
Giving Feedback	This is the stage of the process where people can see how their involvement has informed decision making and improvement in service delivery.

### **3.2 Methods of consultation and engagement**

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

#### **Engagement 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.

A series of 'Connecting Community' events will be delivered across the district. These will be focused around strategic priorities and headlines that have been identified in consultation or through the annual residents' surveys to include themes of rural isolation and strengthening communities. These events will encourage a multi-agency approach inviting key voluntary organisations, groups and stakeholders to bring together a depth and wealth of knowledge, support and guidance for local communities.

We will deliver a calendar of 'micro Connecting Community' activities throughout the year using key district events as platforms to engage targeted audiences to share information and signpost residents to local services and opportunities. These will be focusing on themes around health and wellbeing, older people and isolated communities and young people & families.

As part of 2017/18 we will develop a Connecting Community pledge that will outline how the Community Services team will respond to residents with inquiries that cannot be answered or signposted on the day of an event but require contacts and information to be sourced and passed on to individuals in the future.

Consultation during, and evaluations of engagement events will be conducted (using a variety of methods including Survey Monkey online, face to face, hard copy surveys). These will happen during and after each event to gauge the impact on the community, make use of the feedback to improve services and shape corporate business plans within the authority.

#### **Links with other Council and District forums**

There are existing forums 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 to share resources and link them with Connecting

Communities events.

### **Village Networks**

The Medium Term Action Plan will link in with Community Services and Customer Services to ensure that we develop this opportunity, making use of the health bus and directing this vehicle to rural locations.

### **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 Residents' Satisfaction Survey**

The annual residents' satisfaction survey asks residents of each district questions about how satisfied they are with the general delivery of services by each council. Traditionally this has been the sole major source of insight and the results of this review are used in the annual business planning process.

The survey is intended as a high level overview of general satisfaction and traditionally explored one or two service areas such as environmental services in a little more depth. It was felt however that this did not dive deeply enough into these services to get meaningful insight into how we can improve service delivery or what outcomes customers wanted, and that many services were not covered. It was further felt that trying to do this in an all-encompassing survey would turn people off from responding as it would be very long and time-consuming.

Therefore in order to reach out to as many people as possible and get as many responses as possible, which will give us more confidence in our satisfaction rates, current survey questions are limited to high level satisfaction and do not explore what residents and business expect and want to see in specific service delivery areas.

Instead, in order to gain the insight into these services that is required to make service improvement and meet customer outcome expectations, the SIIT will be conducting a series of deep dive consultations into all services, where targeted service users will be asked a more insightful range of questions.

### **Service Deep Dives**

The 'service specific' deep dives will, as their name suggests, explore in detail all aspects of service delivery to gauge whether they are meeting customer

expectations, to understand what those expectations are and where we can make improvements or efficiencies. Working closely with the service teams to design appropriate questions and challenge areas for improvement, the responses will be used to review and build comprehensive service delivery plans that improve on customer satisfaction by delivering the outcomes customers want. These service plans will be used in the corporate business planning process to promote corporate priorities and to drive staff objectives.

The deeper dive approach will consist of a variety of consultation methods:

- Surveys through the online corporate consultation software
- Face to face Q&A/feedback sessions
- Focus groups
- Forums
- Evaluation from events/engagement events

The most effective method will be chosen for each service area and will be relevant to the customer segment and the deeper dives will be scheduled to be repeated at least once a year for both internal and external customers to ensure we capture the changing market and the commercialisation drive of the council. Lessons learnt from complaints and results from previous surveys will start to produce an evidence base of improving services' relationships with customers and continuing to strive for service improvement and efficiencies across the council.

### **Internal Staff Consultations**

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

The service specific deeper dive consultations will also include internal customer satisfaction/feedback to both improve internal working relationships and signposting for external enquiries. An example of this internal research is the IT Service Desk feedback survey carried out in early 2017 and the benchmarking exercise for the newly-formed Strategic Intelligence & Insight Team.

### **Targeted Surveys**

The corporate online consultation tool for the council is Survey Monkey. This can be used to contact residents either in targeted groups or as a percentage of all on the Land Registry database. The Strategic Intelligence and Insight Team will assist services in setting up online surveys as well as providing guidance on question-setting to ensure these surveys link back to service plans and improved service delivery.

Targeted surveys can also be set up for postal, telephone or face to face information-gathering. 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.

The SIIT will work with commissioners and services to understand customer segments and target these appropriately.

### **New Residential Developments**

As part of the Connecting Communities programme, new developments across the district are engaged and consulted with to make sure new residents are involved in building a strong community moving forward and are aware of District council services as new customers. Connecting Community packs will be made available during 2017/18 to all new residents to signpost individuals to services and opportunities in the district and locally to them.

### **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. The community Infrastructure lead holds a Parish Clerks Forum annually which promotes council services and addresses local issues which recently have included – The Local Plan, Woman’s Aid, Planning and Dog Fouling etc.

### **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 staff. A programme of new topics and themes will be provided linking to our voluntary sector partners, statutory groups and key stakeholders and will be driven by our equalities action plan to deliver events and talks with relevant themes to have an impact within the authority. Staff attendance can be used as part of personal development plans and a way to encourage staff uptake of events and a source of consultation feedback.

These events have been rolled out to the council in 2016 with the ‘See it - Report it’ programme of safeguarding topics. It is aimed to link ‘knowing our communities’ staff briefings to the appraisal and personal development plans as a way to encourage greater staff uptake of the events and a broader understanding of national issues that might be affecting our customers.

## **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 alongside current and forthcoming public consultations.

### **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. To build on this database, the council has asked respondents to this year's Annual Residents' Satisfaction Survey to submit their contact details if they are willing to be part of a panel for future consultations.

### **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 for distribution to local media (including press, online and broadcast outlets) to raise awareness of the consultation and engagement activities and therefore encourage community involvement and feedback.

## **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 six aims and will also support the council's Corporate Business Plan.

### **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 Strategic Intelligence and Insight Team.

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