



REPORT TO: Council Meeting

DATE OF MEETING: 25th May 2006

REPORT OF: Assistant Chief Executive

SUBJECT: Chester-le-Street Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy

ITEM NUMBER: 19

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek the Council's agreement to the councils Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy.
- 1.2 Members are recommended to adopt the Community and Engagement Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 and Summarised in Appendix 2.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 Corporate Management Team and Service Team Managers have been consulted on a draft Structure Document and the have been consulted on the report. Service Team Managers and teams were engaged in the engagement audit which informed the development of the strategy. The Strategy was considered at the meeting of the Executive on 8th May 2006 where Members agreed to recommend that that Council adopts the Strategy subject to inclusion of proposals to engage the LSP and other partners while building education into the action plan.
- 2.2 Strong Overview and Scrutiny Committee have been engaged in a review of Member and public attendance at committees. A report on the Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy was considered at their Panel Meeting on 11th May 2006. While the Panel supported the main vision and thrust of the Strategy they challenged the scale of the work required and the "SMARTness" of some of the action plans. In addition they commented that:
- The document could be reduced in size
 - The action plan could be more explicit about media management
 - Examples of national best practice could have been included
 - Not one size fits all and what might be expected in a major single tier organisation may not be appropriate for a small district like Chester-le-Street
 - Where estate walkabouts happen sometimes there is no perceived action or feedback

- 2.3 It is accepted that there is a great deal of work to do in implementing the strategy. In view of the possible change both within and outside the council the Strategy is not written in stone and the action plan attached to the it is proposed to be a living document. It is therefore likely to be the subject of change in terms of actions, timescales and responsibilities. It may also change as a result of further involvement and engagement with partners and the community. These issues can be reviewed and more clarity given on measures and performance indicators during the programme and project management process. In terms of the size of the document it was considered that the document needed to address the challenges in detail and this is an important part of the main document. A summary document was provided to provide a separate and easier to read Strategy. A further action has been included to address media management. It is fully accepted that one size does not fit all. What it is felt that strategy does is address a road map for the council to approach engagement issues and make choices about what is right for Chester-le-Street. The issue of undertaking action and addressing feedback is an issue that the council does need to address across all services.
- 2.4 The Resident's Survey and Tenant's Survey have been used to inform the development of the strategy.
- 2.5 The views of partners on Strategy content have been sought and at the time of writing of this report representations had been received from the Police and the Primary Care Trust. The Police feel that the community engagement is an important part of fighting crime and fear of crime. While they do not have a Strategy yet community engagement is at the heart of their reassurance Strategy. The Police consider that there is merit in a multi agency forum to support neighbourhood policing so long as the public and no single partner drives the agenda. Currently they are undertaking a Best value Review of Community Engagement and Volunteering. They feel that the Strategy should:
- embrace close working relationships and link in with partners where appropriate; and
 - be able to support collaborative arrangements such as the Neighbourhood Management Pilots.
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- It is considered that the Strategy actively addresses these issues.
- 2.6 The PCT have Patient and Public Involvement Strategy and Action Plan for 2006/2007. They have identified as one of the main gaps was the need to develop coherent work that fully addresses diversity issues, specifically work which captures the views of working people, children and young people and our local ethnic minority groups. They feel there could be scope for joint working to address these issues. Approaches need to be more proactive and creative than in the past. The PCT would therefore welcome the development of any engagement arrangements that would promote further collective involvement from residents, agencies and elected members. The PCT point out that they are undergoing significant reorganisation and would appreciate the opportunity to participate in future events that contribute to the development of the Strategy.
- 2.7 A meeting with the CVS is took place on 11th May and the Strategy was discussed. The CVS is to provide comments in due course.

3. CORPORATE PLAN AND PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The subject of this report is relevant to the council's Corporate Plan and all the council's priorities. In particular the development of the Strategy is a specific proposal within the corporate plan. Adoption and implementation of the Strategy will also address several action points in the council's Improvement and Recovery Plan 2 including the development of the Strategy itself and addressing the Local Government Associations Manifesto. The production of the Strategy is planned for adoption by the end of May 2006 within IRP2. The Strategy is also required by the Council's Equality Plan (incorporating the Race Equality Scheme and Equality Policy).
- 3.2 The Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy will directly contribute to achieving the councils vision which is '**Working together to fulfil the needs of our communities**'.

4. IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Financial
There will be financial implications as a result of implementing the Strategy. One of the aims of the Strategy is to do things differently and it is likely that the result of implementation will be to achieve efficiency savings across partner organisations by avoiding duplication. Financial implications will be addresses as part of the project management of the Strategy.
- 4.2 Legal
It is not considered that the report presents any significant legal implications. Any implication that may arise, including working with children and young people will be addressed through a project management approach to Strategy implementation.
- 4.3 Personnel
Human resource issues in relation to improvements set out in the Strategy plan will be built into individual services plans and managed at Directorate and Service Team level
- 4.4 Other Services
The Strategy is by definition a corporate strategic approach to engaging people in service delivery and affects all services. The strategy continues to promote new ways of working and as a result of change there will be impacts on other services delivered within and outside the council. These impacts will need to be built into Risk Management Plans for all service Plans and will be taken into account in the risk assessment for the implementation of the Strategy..
- 4.5 Diversity
Progress on Equality and Diversity is a key issue in respect of the report. The council is improving on equality and diversity issues. The report has no implications on excluding any customer from accessing services delivered by the council. This is

quite the opposite and the Strategy positively addresses those parts of the community who have previously not accessed the council well including 'hard to reach' and 'hard to hear groups.

4.6 Risk

In respect of the Strategy the biggest risk to the organisation is to fail to engage the community in all aspects of the council's work. The Strategy itself aims to ensure that this does not happen

4.7 Crime and Disorder

It is not felt there are any specific implications of the report on Crime and Disorder. Crime remains a key issue for our community and it is not an issue the council can resolve on its own. Working in Partnership is one of the council's priorities and this is not proposed to change. The police are concerned that some of their partners do not have sufficient regard to Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act. The Strategy takes into account the views of the Police and recent discussion with the Police on joint action to take forward Neighbourhood Policing and commits the council to sharing community engagement with them and other partners.

4.8 Other Implications

The report does not relate to a key decision. It is considered that the strategy itself can be communicated to the community by in a number of ways including inclusion on the web-site and through media engagement and releases. A summary document is also available. A principle thrust of the Strategy is to improve the reputation of the council and ensure it communicates better with the districts communities. As a result the Strategy proposes to improve communications across the board. The strategy has implications for e-government, procurement and social exclusion and these issues are addressed in the Strategy.

5. **BACKGROUND, POSITION STATEMENT AND OPTION APPRAISAL**

5.1 In their March Progress Assessment, reported elsewhere on the agenda for this Executive the Audit Commission confirm the councils own view that it still does not have enough engagement with the community, although this is improving. The Commission note that;

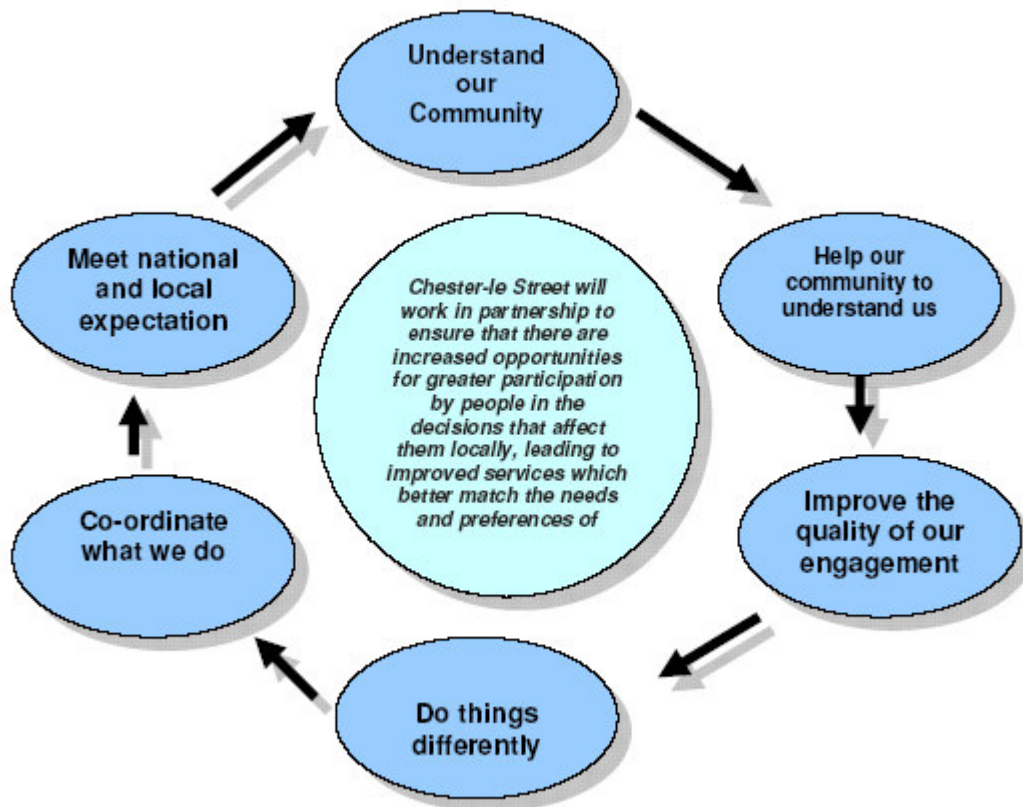
- The Council's approach to consultation is improving.
- While it does not have a consistent or co-ordinated approach to consultation and engagement and it does not have sufficient information to enable it to fully understand the needs of local communities, it is developing a community engagement strategy.
- It improved its engagement with local communities during 2005 by undertaking a resident's survey, establishing a tenants' panel and compact and carrying out some user focus groups. corporate plan priorities
- Drawing together and showing linkages on our environmental

5.2 The council has also learned from the recent inspection of its Environmental Services and it is likely that the Commissions final report may recommend that the council communicates what it is doing better. The council accepts these views and that it is why it built proposals in its corporate plan and Improvement and Recovery Pan accordingly.

5.3 The Strategy is based on the national vision for engagement and the local context for improvement. An audit carried out last September and the review work of the Strong Overview and Scrutiny Panel on public and Member attendance has underpinned the development of the Strategy. The Strategy is considered to be a transitional yet transformational one. It acknowledges that the council must find out more about our communities and communicate with them about what the council is doing so it can better engage people on the basis of understanding and mutual trust. The Vision of the Strategy is proposed as:

Chester-le Street will work in partnership to ensure that there are increased opportunities for greater participation by people in the decisions that affect them locally, leading to improved services which better match the needs and preferences of communities.

The general aims are proposed as follows:



5.4 It is extremely important to the future of the council and our communities that we improve engagement. The Strategy sets out a detailed action plan to achieve what is felt to be required.

5.5 It is proposed to hold internal and external events to help develop the Strategy. Internal events will be aimed at embedding the strategy into the organisation and can involve both Members and Officers. External events will include:

- A specific District Partnership event to encourage LSP partner support and shared ownership of the strategy

- More general events which engage partners and the community not specifically involved in the LSP.

6. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 Members are recommended to agree and support the Community and Engagement Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 and Summarised in Appendix 2.

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS / DOCUMENTS REFERRED**

- 7.1 Chester-le-Street Corporate Plan 2005/2008
7.2 Chester-le-Street Improvement and Recovery Plan 2 – November 2005
7.3 Audit Commission Progress Assessment - Chester-le-Street District Council March 2006
7.4 Chester-le-Street Community Engagement Audit – September 2005
7.5 Local Government Association Manifesto December 2004
7.6 Draft report of the Strong Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Public and Member attendance submitted to the Strong OSP on 22nd March 2006.
7.7 Report to Executive on 8th May 2006
7.8 Report to Strong Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 11th May 2006
7.9 Letter from Durham and Chester-le-Street PCT dated 25th April 2006
7.10 Letter from Durham constabulary dated 3rd May 2006

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11th May 2006
Version 1.1

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