

**Open Report on behalf of Richard Wills
Executive Director for Environment & Economy**

Report to:	Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny
Date:	12 December 2017
Subject:	Citizen Engagement Strategy

Summary:

Lincolnshire County Council has created a number of citizen engagement and customer-related documents over the last five years as this area of activity has grown increasingly important and central to Local Government activity. This report describes the proposal to bring all of this documentation, some of which has been superseded or replaced, together in one Citizen Engagement Strategy. This report aims to seek the involvement of the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee in agreeing a proposal to consider potential future options in the development of the strategy.

Actions Required:

Members of the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee are invited to consider and comment on the report and:

- 1) Support the initial work and timeframe of future actions included as part of the report
- 2) Highlight any additional priorities for officers to consider as part of the development process
- 3) Approve the formation and nominate membership of a Working Group, to meet after a workshop open to all elected members has been held on Tuesday 9 January 2018, to consider potential future options. The Working Group will bring recommended options back to this Committee in March 2018

1. Background

Like our communities, geography and individuals, Community Engagement is diverse and varied. Recognising this, the current Community Engagement Strategy, dated 2013-2018, contains nine commitments which include working through councillors to share and gather information, using appropriate methods and language for our audiences and enabling the voluntary sector to support people to get involved.

Many of the existing strategy's reference points, such as The Cabinet Office Principles and the Council's Customer Charter have, since its creation, been

replaced or updated. Others, however, are still relevant, such as the Gunning Principles, which have helped to form case law over more than 30 years. Of the nine points in the action plan, five were fully completed; with the remaining four either partially complete or continually developing.

The externally facing strategy is supported by the Community Engagement Policy, which guides staff on the implementation and delivery of the strategy, and states that officers are '*strongly recommended*' to use the Community Engagement Team when embarking on engagement activity. Those services that have used the Team have provided positive feedback on the support provided, but there remains a need to ensure a uniform approach to engagement to meet the needs of citizens, ensure the council is safeguarded from legal challenge as far as possible and make most effective use of resources. As the existing document reaches its end date, there is an opportunity to review and develop a new, broader strategy. As the document is included within the Council's Constitution the final document will need to be presented to full Council in May 2018.

With other customer and citizen-related documents/strategies under review or being developed, it makes sense to consider producing a single strategy that members of the public can access and which would direct them, through provision of hyperlinks, to those connecting documents – for example Petitions, Corporate Complaints & Compliments and Customer Insight.

2. Content

It is proposed that the new Citizen Engagement Strategy covers a five year period from mid-2018 to the end of 2023. Its priorities should address and include:

- An updated Customer Service Charter, the Customer Insight Charter, revised Petitions Scheme and the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Policy
- Definitions associated with engagement, and consultation so everyone is clear what we mean by the terms we use
- The process, methodologies and standards for engaging with citizens so everyone is working in a way that encourages and enables involvement
- Reference to a proposed citizens survey to gauge opinion on life in Lincolnshire and the services provided by the County Council
- The latest legislation and information about the best way to promote on-going relationships to avoid the need for unnecessary consultation and therefore the increased threat of legal challenge
- How information and intelligence will be used to develop and improve services
- How we will ensure information, advice and guidance is accessible

It should include:

- An updated set of actions to support delivery of the strategy
- A revised and updated Customer Service Charter, which references our commitments to citizens, what we expect in return and detailed, contractual

standards required of organisations delivering services on our behalf, such as the Customer Service Centre provision, currently delivered by Serco

- The draft Customer Insight Charter which aims to provide the framework to maintain and improve the high levels of customer service frontline staff deliver. It will also make sure that we seek and embed public views and ideas, as well as making best use of demographic information and intelligence, to inform and improve our planning, commissioning and delivery of services
- Links to the revised petitions scheme, which is currently under review
- Links to the Corporate Complaints and Compliments guidance documents
- Reference to the Council's Community Engagement Policy

These documents have their own aims, objectives, priorities and actions, as illustrated in the table below:

Aims	Objectives	Priorities	Actions
Community Engagement Strategy (external, outward looking document)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give everyone the opportunity to have their say on local issues that affect/ interest them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake co-ordinated, robust and appropriate engagement • Make engagement a fundamental part of service review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure engagement is effective, inclusive has genuine influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a plan of future engagement activity • Promote the Community Engagement Team's 'offer' • Evaluate engagement activity to ensure we are meeting our own standards • Widely advertise engagement opportunities and ensure they are accessible • Use clear language • Feedback on all involvement • Work through local councillors (county, district and town/parish councils) • Produce a toolkit to outline different engagement techniques • Be involved in key partnerships • Work with & grant aid infrastructure organisations so communities can be actively involved • Develop community hubs
Community Engagement Policy (internal, also externally accessible document)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clarity on what community engagement is • Outline the quality standards expected when engaging communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly recommends utilising the skills and knowledge of the Community Engagement Team when undertaking community engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the Gunning and Brown Principles to ensure that where engagement takes the form of formal consultation it adheres to good practice and the law • Follow the Quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform officers of and promote the policy and Community Engagement Team 'Offer' • Highlight the strong recommendation to contact the Community Engagement Team before planning engagement activity • Promote and utilise the QAP to ensure engagement meets the Council's own standards

Aims	Objectives	Priorities	Actions
		Assurance (QAP) to engagement strict criteria	Process to ensure meets
Customer Insight Charter (external, outward looking document)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the framework to maintain and improve high levels of customer service • Seek and embed public views and ideas, make best use of demographic information and other intelligence to improve services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate clearly and encourage people to use different methods of contacting the council • Manage expectations • Influence perceptions for a positive customer experience • Make best use of information we gather • Feedback how citizens have shaping decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage stakeholders • Achieve 'channel choice' • Feedback to citizens • Routinely cross-reference 'known' data with feedback • Make sure analysis and review leads to action • Live up to our corporate values • Communicate clearly • Resolve issues quickly • Build our reputation • Ensure data is processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss and develop approaches with key partners • Improve access through a choice of channels and use the best method for each customer while promoting electronic and self-service methods • Produce 'You said, We did' summaries • Seek and share good practice • Analyse feedback to monitor how well we're doing • Use CRM to record contacts and understand citizens • Proof read and test information • Speak clearly, openly and succinctly to resolve matters quickly • Record and analyse quality and timeliness of responses • Plan communications, utilising good news, celebrations and national events to build relationships • Always process data in accordance with the law

Aims	Objectives	Priorities	Actions
Corporate Customer Complaints and Compliments Policy (internal, also externally accessible document)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give people an excellent level of customer service • Make sure our customers are satisfied with the service they receive • Provide a professional service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clarity on how matters raised will be received and responded to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote policy to ensure citizens know how to complain • Implement internal processes to deal with complaints and compliments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce a procedural guidance document to support the policy • Create, promote and implement a complaints process • Review and analyse complaints to establish learning and implement findings
Petitions Scheme (external, outward looking document)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define how petitions should be presented to the Council and how the Council will deal with them (paper and online) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable communities and individuals to engage with the Council on a particular issue and influence decision making on local matters • Ensure a clear, transparent and robust process for handling petitions • Clarify how the Council will deal with petitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the current scheme to establish a clear process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear information on how to submit a petition and how the Council deals with petitions • Guide the public as to alternative ways to resolve issues • Ensure a range of flexible actions the system can take in response to a petition • Ensure the scheme is accessible, clearly explained and well publicised • Ensure the petitioner is informed at each stage of the petition process • Produce a procedural guidance documents to support the petition process, including officer protocols, public guidance documents and templates, and a centrally maintained administration system

Aims	Objectives	Priorities	Actions
Customer Service Charter (external, outward looking document)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the Council's promise to provide the best possible experience however people choose to get in touch when they require our services • Recognise our duty to deal with all customers fairly and value their diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put the customer at the centre of our organisation • Offer different ways of getting in touch, which are easy and convenient for the customer and set appropriate standards of service to ensure this happens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aim to resolve queries at the first point of contact • Ensure customer service is at the forefront of our planning • Serve with integrity, fairness and honesty • Strive to improve all the time and put things right if they go wrong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with our partners to achieve our promise of delivering a first class customer service • Regularly seek customer views • Be polite, helpful and treat people with respect • Listen carefully to understand customer's needs • Staff will always give their name or wear a name badge to identify themselves • Inform customers of the actions they have taken or will take

Proposal

With engagement being such a broad and cross cutting issue, to support and inform the strategy development process a workshop is proposed for all elected members who have an interest in engagement. The purpose will be to provide more detailed background, to discuss key elements and priorities and to agree the outline content. An agenda will be drafted and circulated with a calendar appointment for all elected members if this Committee agrees this proposal.

It is also proposed that a working group is formed, comprising Scrutiny Committee members, following the workshop, to take forward and agree draft recommendations, begin to draft an action plan and ensure officers developing the document do not miss any vital elements that should be included. The table below gives a brief overview of the development timetable:

Committee	Date
Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny	12 December 2017
Proposed Workshop	9 January 2018
Working Group meetings	Mid/late January 2018
Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Pre-decision Scrutiny	13 March 2018
Executive	4 April 2018
Full Council	18 May 2018
Go live (if approved)	21 May 2018

Legal Considerations

Engagement as a general activity aimed at the gathering of customer feedback and insight to inform the development of services is not governed by legal requirements. However, formal consultation is regulated by law and may give rise to legal challenge if not done correctly. Therefore anything we say or hint at in our strategy regarding how or when we will consult with our citizens may give rise to a legal obligation to consult and may be used to support a legal challenge. The document therefore must be entirely clear about when it is referring to consultation rather than general engagement and must be realistic, and achievable and adhered to by all staff.

The current engagement policy states that officers are '*strongly recommended*' to contact the Community Engagement team at the beginning of any engagement planning. However, given a desire to improve engagement and consultation quality across the organisations and with the risk of challenge that may arise one suggestion is to change the phrase to '*must* contact the Community Engagement Team'. This would reflect the way that the Information Governance and SNAP teams have to be involved in elements of the engagement process.

3. Conclusion

As this document shows, the Citizen Engagement Strategy will comprise many strands and therefore needs to be detailed, coherent and straightforward. It will need to cover priorities for the next five years, be very clear about our commitments to our citizens to ensure we do not over promise or put ourselves at risk of legal challenge and include a SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time limited) action plan. It should also be succinct, understandable and helpful to elected members, officers and most importantly Lincolnshire citizens who wish to engage with the County Council.

We would like to seek permission to form a workshop with a cross section of elected members, followed by a work group of Scrutiny Committee representatives, to review and discuss the strategy priorities, actions and outline content to ensure it is fit for purpose. This will help us to create a useable document that has broad support, protects the Council and can make a difference to our citizens.

The final recommended draft strategy will be presented to the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny in March 2018 as part of a pre-decision scrutiny item, before being considered for approval by the Executive in April and Full Council in May 2018.

4. Consultation

a) Have Risks and Impact Analysis been carried out?

N/A

b) Risks and Impact Analysis

Risk and Impact Analyses will be completed during late 2017, prior to the documents return to Scrutiny Committee, when a draft strategy has been prepared.

5. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Community Engagement Strategy 2013 - 2018

6. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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