

CABINET



Report subject	Connected Communities – BCP Council’s Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy 2021-2024
Meeting date	29 September 2021
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>This report details the development of the Connected Communities – BCP Council’s Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy 2021-2024. The purpose of this strategy is to provide clear principles about how the Council engages and consults with the local community. The report outlines the background, strategic context, engagement, and consultation principles, aims and actions to deliver this across the Council and seeks approval from Cabinet to adopt the strategy.</p> <p>The strategy outlines a Council-wide approach to ensuring that our engagement and consultation processes are inclusive and accessible and enable us to engage with everyone including those whose voices are often seldom heard in the decision-making process.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) Cabinet approves the Connecting Communities- BCP’s Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy 2021-2024 incorporating the BCP Council Engagement Principles and action plan(b) Cabinet notes the £50k of annual additional resources requested to support the delivery of the plans from 2022/23 onwards.(c) Cabinet notes that the £50k of annual additional resources will formally be recommended to Council as part of the 2022/23 budget and Medium- Term Financial Plan Update report in February 2022.

<p>Reason for recommendations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) There is no statutory requirement to develop a Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy for BCP Council, however the development of a set of engagement principles, processes and standards provides clarity to the communities of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole around the standards they can expect when engaging with the Council.b) The development of a Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy enables us to develop the way we engage and consult with our communities, improving our engagement levels and ensuring a consistent approach across all areas of the Council.c) The development of a Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy which details the approaches it will use to engaging and consulting with the community ensures that the Council is delivering its Corporate Plan priority of Connected Communities and its Vibrant Communities priority in Our Big Plan.d) The details within the Strategy propose far reaching methods to ensure that alongside traditional methods of consultation we are reaching out to seek the views of those who would often not engage in mainstream consultation techniques. This will enable BCP Council to understand how to engage and consult with all sectors of society.e) To support the transformation of the council, ensuring communities and partnerships are embedded in the heart of the council as part of its operating model and supporting the development of strength-based approaches to working with our communities.f) This strategy enables us to achieve the outcomes in the BCP Council's Big Plan and the Corporate Strategy regarding our commitment to developing vibrant communities, with an outstanding quality of life, where everyone plays an active role.
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Portfolio Holder(s):	Cllr Karen Rampton, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Adults Cllr Jane Kelly, Lead Member for Community Engagement
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Wards	All wards in BCP
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. The purpose of the Connecting Communities - BCP's Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy 2021-2024 is to set out the principles and standards for how the council will engage and consult with its communities in a meaningful, two-way process. It seeks to ensure that our communities are at the heart of everything we do. The strategy also details our commitment to work collaboratively with the community, where resources and timescales allow, to enable the community to:
 - have a greater say and choice in the design and delivery of local services
 - develop new skills and expertise
 - become better informed about the council's work
2. This will ensure that communities understand the rationale behind the decisions that need to be made by the Council, are aware of the different options that are available to try and address this and can be involved in providing their views about which option is the best for both the council and the community. This enables open and transparent conversations to take place over potentially complex decisions in a more meaningful and productive way.
3. In January 2020, the council began a comprehensive consultation across the conurbation, asking for resident's views on a set of underlying principles that would inform the development of the Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy. Views were also sought about the ways in which people currently get involved with BCP Council, how they prefer to be engaged with and what would encourage them to have their say. The overwhelming feedback from the consultation was that there was strong support for the proposed principles, and we have built on those responses to develop for this strategy. The consultation results are detailed further in the section 'We asked, you said, we did' of the full and summary strategies and in the full report (Appendix F, Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy Consultation Report Jan- Apr 2020)

4. The Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy builds upon existing best practice that currently takes place across council services and our partners. The aim is to embed these principles and procedures to maximise the benefits of engagement for all our communities and enable us to provide services which better meet their needs. The strategy details how the council will improve the way in which it involves residents, service users, the community and voluntary sector, local business, and social enterprises and demonstrates the council's commitment to continually involving and consulting to make a real difference to the lives of residents and the type of services provided.
5. The Strategy also considers the requirements under the council's duty to consult as outlined in the Local Government Act 1999, the Equality and Diversity Governance Framework, the Council's Corporate Strategy, and the Big Plan 2021.

Community Engagement

6. Community engagement is about giving people the confidence, skills, and power so they can get involved, shape and influence the planning, development, and delivery of services. Delivering engagement activities can take many different forms and the level of involvement can vary greatly. This can range from providing simple routes for people to report issues such as fly-tipping through to involving communities in co-designing services. Communities, residents, and businesses all have diverse needs and improving stakeholder dialogue will raise the council's reputation and build trust. Communities that are given the opportunity to have greater choice in the design, and delivery of their services will see those services delivered appropriately and more effectively. Removing any physical, language or social barriers for communities to access information or voice their opinions will see local communities better informed and with a clearer understanding of the policies, priorities, and the challenges.

Consultation

7. Consultation is a two-way process in which people are fully informed about the options available and are asked their opinion on an issue the council is considering. Consultation has a defined start and end date and opinions from consultation activity should be used to inform decisions in a clear and transparent way. Feedback from consultation activity is used alongside performance, intelligence, legal, financial and sustainability information to make decisions about how council services are delivered. We want to ensure that our communities can be aware of and be able to take part in consultations that matter to them. We also want to ensure that we have consistent standards for how we consult with our communities and the action plan contains a range of measures which will help us to achieve this.
8. This Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy details the approach to engaging with communities to:
 - proactively seek out community values, concerns, and aspirations.
 - incorporate those values, concerns and aspirations into a decision-making process or processes; and

- establish an ongoing partnership with the community to ensure that the community's priorities and values continue to shape services.
9. It provides a set of principles that the Council can uphold in relation to engaging with and listening to community and sets out what the community can do to get involved and have their say. It also reflects on engagement being a two-way process and includes the role that our communities can play in making a difference.

Strategic Context

10. This strategy aims to bring consistency, quality and innovation to the way engagement and consultation is delivered across council services. It is aligned to our core strategies, our Big Plan, and our transformation programme which places communities at the centre of our operating model.
11. BCP Council has been working towards transforming itself into a modern, efficient, cost-effective organisation. As part of the transformation, one of the key principles is to develop vibrant communities by ensuring that community empowerment and resilience are at the heart of everything we do. This strategy plays a key role in ensuring that we achieve this by creating the environment and opportunity for everyone to play an active role.
12. The Corporate Plan states a priority to deliver *“Connected Communities: empowering our communities so everyone feels safe, engaged and included.”* The Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy will help the council to achieve this by providing a framework which will enable the council to:
- better understand and respond to the needs of local people.
 - be more accountable to local people.
 - plan and deliver better services.
 - make more efficient use of public resources.
 - take transparent decisions based on robust evidence.
 - build strong and positive relationships within and between local communities.
 - test out ideas and explore emerging issues.
 - measure the performance of the Council in delivering services.
13. ‘Our Big Plan’ was launched in 2021 and outlines our vision for the future of BCP, creating ‘A world class city region- one of the best coastal places in the world in which to live, work, invest and play. We want to harness the potential of our coastline of opportunity and make BCP a place where people and businesses want to be because of: -
- of the vibrancy of our communities
 - the strength of our economy
 - the skills of our people
 - the wealth of our culture and the quality of our infrastructure
 - our environment and quality of life.’
14. BCP Council is also investing in developing Vibrant Communities using strength-based approaches and Asset Based Community Development. This is a

commitment and an approach to developing a relationship with residents and giving them the space and support to develop their own solutions. One of the fundamental principles is that everyone and everywhere has assets upon which resilient, healthy communities can be built. Some of these assets may be obvious such as parks and open spaces, community events, community centres and community and voluntary sector organisations. But many assets are hidden within our communities, often within the residents that make up our communities and may need time, trust, and patience to be discovered. Strengths-based community approaches are at the heart of this strategy.

Community Engagement and Consultation Principles

15. The strategy provides a set of principles that the council upholds in relation to engaging with, and listening to, the community and what the community can do to get involved and have their say. It also reflects on engagement being a two-way process and includes the role that our communities can play in making a difference.

16. Principle 1 – Involving Communities

This principle seeks to provide flexible and innovative involvement opportunities for communities to help shape the development and delivery of quality services and the relevant policies that reflect local needs. It also seeks to put residents at the centre of collaborative decision-making processes, sharing skills, and engagement and consultation opportunities.

17. Principle 2 – Inclusive Communities

This principle ensures we will make information accessible to all and consider how best to engage in diverse ways and in a variety of accessible formats. Our engagement with communities will be timely and meaningful and we will work hard to include all communities who have a stake in the matter.

18. Principle 3 – Transparent with our Communities

This principle seeks to ensure that we will deliver engagement and consultation opportunities, where we are clear about the decision-making processes, what can be influenced and what can be delivered. We will work with our communities to produce solutions and we will encourage communities to be actively engaged and help to deliver these solutions.

19. Principle 4 – Keeping it Simple

This principle seeks to ensure we use appropriate and consistent approaches to engagement and use clear and concise language as part of the process and that feedback to our communities will be delivered clearly across all formats, digital and in person.

20. Principle 5 – Collaborative Communities

This principle seeks to ensure we will promote partnership working and the crucial role that it plays in delivering services for all our residents. We will support

local community and voluntary groups to help ensure that they have the capacity to improve the lives of the communities they serve.

Consultation and engagement are the keyways the council interacts with and involves local communities and residents. Through this we provide opportunities for communities to understand what the council does, provide a range of ways for community voices to be heard and for these views to feed into the decision-making process. There are two versions of the strategy and a delivery plan. (Appendix A) is the full version which contains comprehensive details and (Appendix B) a summary document for easy reading. (Appendix C) is the three-year delivery plan which details the actions, timelines and monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes.

21. The delivery plan accompanying the Strategy details the activities the work which will take place in order to achieve the desired outcomes. These include activities such as the establishment of area/neighbourhood forums across BCP as a platform for engagement alongside the roll out of strength-based approaches (Asset Based Community Development) to working with our communities. In order to achieve these outcomes, there is a requirement for an annual Community Engagement budget of £50,000 which is proposed as a growth item within the MTFP for 2022/23. This is detailed further in sections 23-26.

Links to other work

22. The strategy builds on the Council's Statement of Community Involvement which uses the same core principles of involvement, collaboration, and inclusion as the basis of community engagement and consultation activities in planning. The engagement work with the Town and Parish Councils as local democracy partners. It aligns closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector and Volunteering Strategy, our work to support the development of Vibrant Communities in our priority areas using strength-based approaches and the transformation of the Council, which aims to put Communities and Partnerships at the heart of everything we do as a Council.

Summary of financial implications

23. The financial cost to adopt the strategy is allocation of an annual Community Engagement budget of £50,000 to enable the actions within the strategy to take place.
24. Cabinet is asked to only note the £50k of additional resources requested to support the Volunteering Strategy from 2022/23 onwards. This is on the basis that Council will formally be requested to approve these resources as part of the 2022/23 budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Update report in February 2022.

Summary of legal implications

25. The Council is required to undertake consultation when there is a statutory duty to consult and for other reasons including having previously consulted about similar decisions, made a promise to consult or if someone is going to lose out on a benefit or a service that they have received for some time. As the actions in the Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy set out how BCP Council will consult and engage with people it is appropriate to undertake a range of activities

that will enable communities within BCP to be able to have the opportunity to participate and influence Council services and policy development. There is no legal requirement to develop a Community Engagement Strategy, however it is considered best practice to have a document which details how the Council will engage with its residents.

Summary of human resources implications

26. There are no additional human resources implications.

Summary of environmental impact

27. There will be a requirement to produce some hard copies of consultation and engagement materials to ensure that we meet our requirements under the Public Sector Equalities Act, however these will be kept to a minimum and the preferred method for consultation feedback will be online and through face-to-face interactions. Any un-used consultation materials will be recycled.

28. Through the development of a robust Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy we will be able to develop networks and routes for ensuring that BCP Council can work with and support the community in its work and commitment to become Carbon Neutral.

Summary of public health implications

29. There are positive public health implications for the development of a robust, comprehensive Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy. Residents will have clearly defined routes for engaging with the Council for raising issues or concerns. Wherever possible, residents will be involved in the shaping of services so that they best meet their needs.

Summary of equality implications

30. (Appendix D, E), the Equalities Impact Assessment, has been completed to assess whether a full Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) is required. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed in line with procedural requirements. This assessment details the negative and positive equality impacts and demonstrates what activities we will deliver to mitigate the negative impacts, as well as demonstrating the positive affects implementing the strategy and delivery plan will deliver.

31. There are considerable positive equality implications which reach beyond ensuring we meet our duty in relation to protected characteristics. The Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy will seek to ensure that equality and diversity is at the heart of everything we do by ensuring there are appropriate methods for communicating and engaging with Communities. Working with key partners e.g., Dorset Race Equality Council and Dots Disability, expanding our community engagement leads and Community Equality Champions Networks will help to ensure that we reach as diverse a community as possible. The expansion of the strengths-based community development work across the 20% most deprived areas of BCP and the continuation of the area/neighbourhood forums will ensure that areas of deprivation will receive investment but that all the areas across the conurbation will have better engagement with the Council services as we work to ensure equality for all.

32. The Corporate Equalities Action Plan details an action under “Understanding and working with your communities” to “Develop a Research and Consultation Governance Framework for BCP that ensures full community engagement.” The implementation of the Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy including Community Engagement Toolkits, accessibility information and access to Council services in built within the actions of the strategy will therefore help the Council to deliver on this action.

Summary of risk assessment

33. The main risk associated with the Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy is that we establish expectations around engagement and consultation standards which apply to the whole Council. Some departments may not have the expertise or experience to undertake these roles effectively. This is mitigated by the establishment of Community engagement and consultation toolkits for staff and providing a central team who can provide training, advice, and guidance to enable service to develop in-house Engagement Champions.

34. Although some of the delivery of the strategy will rely on consultation and engagement activities that will be offered face to face, any details on the risks associated with undertaking public consultations and engagement activities such as local meetings will be covered by individual risk assessments that will required on a case-by-case basis as part of the consultation and engagement planning.

Background papers

Appendices

Appendix A, Connecting Communities - BCP's Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy 2021-2024 Full version

Appendix B, Connecting Communities - BCP's Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy 2021-2024 Summary Version

Appendix C, Connecting Communities – BCP's Community Engagement & Consultation Strategy 2021-2024 Delivery Plan

Appendix D, Equality Impact Assessment Delivery Plan (EQIA)

Appendix E, Equalities Impact Assessment Report (EQIA)

Appendix F, Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy Consultation Report Jan- Apr 2020