

9th June 2010

Central Bedfordshire Community Engagement Strategy 2010 - 2013

Central Bedfordshire Community Engagement Strategy

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Community Engagement Strategy - Executive Summary

This strategy has been developed by Central Bedfordshire Together (the Local Strategic Partnership for Central Bedfordshire - "LSP") which comprises senior representatives of: the Local Authority; Police; Fire; Health; Education; Business; Town & Parish Councils; and the Third Sector.

The aim of this Community Engagement Strategy is to deliver greater added value to our citizens by understanding their needs and issues, and giving them a greater involvement in the decision-making process and access to public sector services.

The current economic climate will result in diminishing financial resources leading to significant restrictions in the delivery of services from the public sector. Consequently, communities will need to be encouraged to do more for themselves.

Good information about our communities is fundamental to ensuring that partnership strategies are genuinely inclusive. A better understanding of our communities' needs will enable scarce public sector resources to be targeted more effectively. This will ensure that services are provided only where they are needed.

This Strategy will enable us to establish a new relationship with individuals and organisations and help communities understand the tough choices and decisions ahead, and manage their expectations about the service levels provided by the public sector in the future.

The Strategy will shift the balance in the way some services will be delivered in the future. On 18th May 2010 the new Government launched its programme for the "Big Society", which includes proposals to give communities more powers, and encourage people to take a more active role in their communities. This Strategy will support the Government's plans to enable citizens, communities and local government to come together to solve problems and improve their localities.

The strategy is based on five key principles, which are set out below:

1. Giving more people more opportunities to influence decisions

We will strengthen the link between decision-makers and local people by:

- giving a greater role to citizens or community representatives in deciding how services are delivered in their area;
- providing more choice and mechanisms for engagement which are appropriate to the locality, issue and audience; and
- identifying opportunities for local people to decide how specific budgets are spent in their community.

2. Enabling Ward Councillors to be leaders in and for their communities.

Councillors will be provided with up-to-date, relevant community intelligence and information, training and officer support to fulfil their community leadership role. Councillors will be:

- kept informed of all key activities in their wards;

- allocated a small budget to spend locally in their wards if resources allow;
- supported to efficiently resolve local issues as quickly as possible;
- supported to communicate and engage with their communities, including conducting ward surgeries and attending key community events in their wards; and
- alerted to any feedback about community issues in their wards.

3. Enhancing the role of Town and Parish Councils.

We will support Town and Parish Councils in the delivery of local services that affect the quality of life of their community. We will:

- enable residents to participate in setting the vision and priorities for their local area, through community-led planning, such as Parish Plans, Town Plans and Neighbourhood Plans;
- work with Town and Parish Councils to devolve budgets for 'quality of life' services to those who want them and where the service will be enhanced by doing so, and only according to the Local Authority's agreed priorities; each application must also be supported by a robust business case that demonstrates improved value for money;
- support clusters of Town and Parish Councils working together to resolve common issues; and
- improve communications by providing a key contact from the Local Authority for each Town and Parish Council, and ensuring appropriate representation in response to requests for Local Authority attendance at Town and Parish Council meetings.

4. Building the capacity of local people to engage.

We will ensure that, where needed, we will develop our communities to have the knowledge, skills and confidence to get involved in decision-making. We will:

- help people to form or join groups that are set up to influence local decisions;
- pilot learning programmes for local people interested in participating in civic and community activities; and
- support the development and implementation of a local Volunteering Strategy.

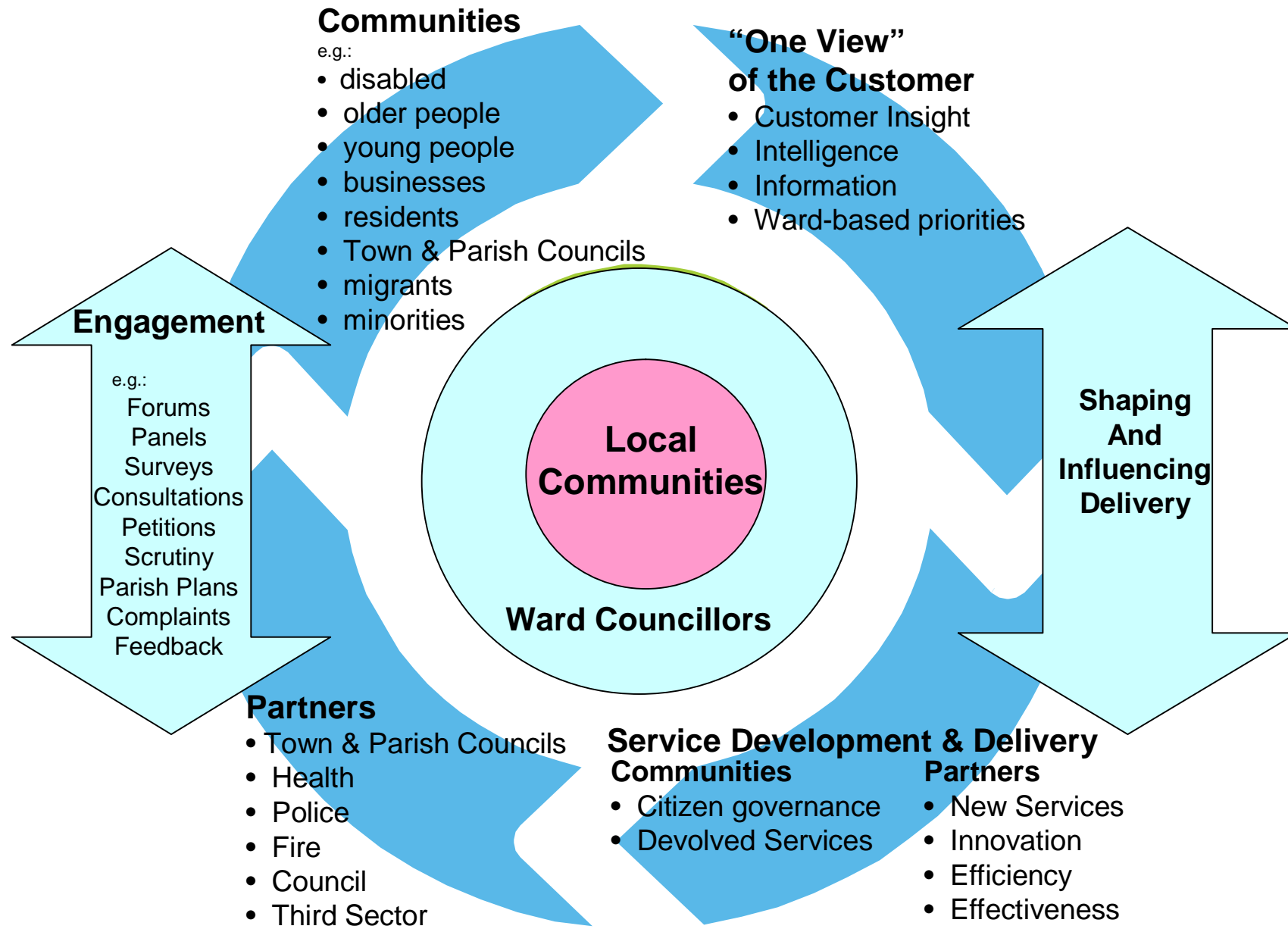
5. Ensuring a strategic and joined-up, coordinated partnership approach.

By sharing opportunities, resources and learning with partners and across directorates, we will save money, avoid duplication, and reduce engagement fatigue for our communities. In doing so we will develop a clear and consistent 'One View' about what our communities really want. This will also support and complement the work being carried out as part of Total Place, for which we are a pilot authority. We have established a joint partner Community Engagement Delivery Group to:

- develop a joint consultation and engagement plan;
- coordinate community engagement at local events; and
- share appropriate data, intelligence and information and customer insight.

This strategy places local people and Councillors, as their elected representatives, at the heart of our community engagement activities. The key principles identified here will remain true irrespective of any possible changes to future public sector operating models in Central Bedfordshire.

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODEL



The Community Engagement Strategy

1. Introduction

This strategy has been developed by Central Bedfordshire Together (the Local Strategic Partnership for Central Bedfordshire - "LSP") which comprises senior representatives of: the Local Authority; Police; Fire; Health; Education; Business; Town & Parish Councils; and the Third Sector.

The outcome of this Community Engagement Strategy is to deliver greater added value to our citizens by understanding their needs and issues, and giving them a greater involvement in the decision-making process and access to public sector services.

This will be delivered by giving more people more opportunities to influence decisions, supporting Councillors to be leaders in and for their communities, enhancing the role of Town and Parish Councils; building the capacity of local people to engage; and developing a more strategic and coordinated partnership approach.

All of the key statutory partners in the LSP including Health, Police, Police Authority, Fire and Rescue Service and the Local Authority have visions that place the citizen at the heart of everything they do. This strategy is designed to enable this and enhance the community engagement activities of other LSP partners including Town and Parish Councils and Third Sector organisations.

This strategy is designed to encourage people to help shape Central Bedfordshire by taking an active part in making or influencing decisions about their locality. Ultimately this will increase satisfaction with all local public services and engender greater pride in Central Bedfordshire as a good place to live, work and visit.

An equality impact assessment of the potential effects of this strategy has been undertaken to ensure effective engagement with all communities, including identifiable groups of people segmented by age, race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, as well as communities disadvantaged by deprivation eg. poverty.

2. What we mean by community engagement

Community engagement is the actions we take to inform, consult, involve and empower communities through ongoing relationships and dialogue. For the Local Authority and its partners community engagement means we will:

Inform: by providing solid, user-friendly information on how to access services and on how local services are performing;

Consult: by seeking advice, information and opinions about our strategies, policies and services, to inform our decision-making and design better services;

Involve: by working together to design and deliver our services, enabling people to be fully involved in the agenda-setting and decision-making process, and deciding together on future developments; and

Empower: by enabling individuals and groups to make decisions and deliver some services themselves.

3. The benefits of this strategy

- Involving our communities in the design and delivery of local services will help us to: improve the quality of service delivery; get it “right first time”, be more responsive and accountable; and deliver better value for taxpayers’ money.
- A joined-up strategic and coordinated partnership approach will save money, avoid duplication, and reduce engagement fatigue for our communities. It will also ensure partners have ‘One View’ about what our communities really want, which will enhance our joint strategic decision-making.
- Supporting Councillors in their leadership role for their community will help ensure the views of local residents are known and considered by their elected representatives when they make key decisions.
- Increasing opportunities to participate in local decisions helps increase trust in public bodies and interest in local democracy.
- Involving people in making decisions about how local money is spent gives communities a better understanding of the difficult prioritisations and trade-offs that have to be made, and a stronger sense of “ownership” over the eventual decision.
- Bringing communities and local decision-makers together to tackle shared concerns creates greater openness about decision-making and can help improve community cohesion.
- Finally, implementing a comprehensive community engagement strategy should not be optional because:
 - a key feature of the bid for unitary government was the opportunity the creation of Central Bedfordshire Council brings to improve the way local public service organisations engage with local people;
 - the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act has placed on authorities a new statutory Duty to Involve, from 1st April 2009 (which this strategy will address);
 - the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill includes an expectation that participatory budgeting will be introduced in all areas from 2012; and
 - understanding our communities and responding to their needs is a key element of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.

4. The scope of this Strategy

This strategy aims to raise the profile of Engagement and Stronger Communities work within the partnership structures. It applies to all methods and processes used by the Local Authority and its partners to inform, consult, involve and empower residents.

In delivering this strategy, the roles of and relationship between those leading on and responsible for the delivery of engagement within the LSP are set out below:

- Ward Councillors will play a lead role as community champions;
- the LSP Board will provide the governance and strategic leadership;
- the Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership will provide the operational leadership; and

- the Community Engagement Delivery Group will coordinate the development and implementation of a joint partnership plan for community engagement.

The officer leads will be Central Bedfordshire Council's Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement and the Chief Executive of Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC), who is also the Theme Lead for the Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership.

Involving, engaging and empowering the community is every service's and partner organisation's responsibility. There are many well established mechanisms for engaging with service users across all of the Council's directorates and partner organisations. This strategy is not about telling services or partners how to engage but to ensure that engagement activities are coordinated and opportunities for joining up and sharing resources, outcomes and learning are maximised. This will reduce the number of consultations and duplication of effort by all, and improve value for money.

Our model of community engagement should be based around the issues identified by the local communities themselves and that these should be the key drivers for our community engagement work – not area structures.

It is clear that “one size does not fit all”. Therefore this strategy envisages a great degree of flexibility and does not create area structures for engagement activities.

This strategy should align with and influence key strategies and policies that have an impact on public engagement directly or indirectly e.g. customer service strategies, communications strategies, consultation plans, budget strategies and business transformation strategies.

5. The Five Key Principles for a successful Community Engagement Strategy

Following broad consultation with a wide range of partners and staff, the consensus on what the key principles for a successful comprehensive community engagement strategy should be are:

1. **Giving more people more opportunities to influence decisions** by increasing the opportunities and mechanisms to enable a wider range of people to get involved in decision-making, and identifying opportunities for local people to decide how specific budgets are spent in their community.
2. **Enabling Ward Councillors to be leaders in and for their communities** by: supporting Councillors to communicate and engage with the people they represent; providing Councillors with up-to-date, relevant information about activities in their wards; and providing each Councillor with a budget to spend locally in their wards. This budget would need to be considered alongside Central Bedfordshire Council's other budget requirements within its annual budget process.
3. **Enhancing the role of Town and Parish Councils** through community-led planning, supporting clusters of Local Authorities to work together to resolve common issues, and devolving budgets to deliver local quality of life services.
4. **Building the capacity of local people to engage** by developing the skills and confidence of local people to engage, increasing communication and cooperation, supporting the voluntary and community sector, and increasing volunteering.

5. **Ensuring a strategic and joined-up, coordinated partnership approach** by sharing appropriate data, intelligence and information to save money, avoid duplication, reduce the number of community consultations, and develop a clear and consistent 'One View' amongst all statutory agencies about what our communities really want, including customer insight.

6. **Delivering the strategy**

The delivery plan in Appendix B sets out the actions to meet the principles of the strategy.

Below details each of the actions under the key principle they relate to.

Principle One: Enabling more people to influence decisions

We want the people of Central Bedfordshire to be able to influence and shape local decisions. The actions below are aimed at strengthening this and facilitate greater empowerment:

1. **Develop a Joint E-Panel for Citizens**

This should be established to enable residents to register their interest in participating in consultations on certain services. By joining an e-panel residents will be able to take part in online surveys, online discussions and opinion polls on the services they are interested in. The topics would normally be generated by partners but e-panel members can also put forward ideas for discussion.

2. **Petitions and E-Petitions:** Petitions have the potential to empower individuals, generate activity in the community and influence decisions. E-petitioning is a statutory requirement, by December 2010, in the new Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

3. **Scrutiny:** The Local Authority's Constitution enables residents to participate in and contribute to investigations by overview and scrutiny committees. The Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit encourages public participation. The aim should be to have at least two investigations per year which involves significant public participation.

4. **Specialist Forums and Citizen Governance:** Key partners will continue to use established forums. These forums should be mapped and rationalised to avoid duplication, reduce costs and make better use of the limited time available for those who take part.

New forums should be encouraged and supported to ensure that all sections of the community are given more and better opportunities to engage. Such forums should be managed centrally to ensure a coordinated approach and to enable any Local Authority services and partners to consult and engage with all sections of the community. This will include new statutory engagement processes such as that set out by the Tenant Services Authority to involve housing tenants in decisions about services that affect them and strengthen the role of the tenant in all housing organisations.

Vulnerable and minority groups are underrepresented in participation in civic roles and engagement and consultation. Groups, such as, older people, young people, women, black and minority ethnic groups, disabled people, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and rurally isolated residents in Central Bedfordshire may fear discrimination and/ or have specific requirements that prevent them from participating in traditional approaches. This strategy will establish a range of approaches including

targeted techniques to specifically ensure appropriate mechanisms are in place to enable greater involvement of these groups.

A Youth Parliament and Local Youth Forums are already in place to influence decisions and services that impact on young people.

Further opportunities will be explored to establish greater links between young people and the democratic decision-making processes.

5. **The Sustainable Communities Act:** This Act allows Local Authorities to put forward proposals from local communities that require action from central government. Proposals can be submitted for any activities that promote the sustainability of an area. Any proposals must be endorsed by a Panel of Local Representatives made up of residents from the local community and representative groups.
6. **Social Networking:** Partners will be asked to explore a Central Bedfordshire social networking website. A relatively easy way of engaging the community is through the use of websites and social networking sites.

LSP partners will be asked to consider investing in a website where local people can tell their stories about Central Bedfordshire, take part in discussions about topics of their choosing in forums, share their thoughts and views or share pictures or videos.

Principle Two: Enabling Ward Councillors to be leaders in and for their communities

Involvement with local people is already a key part of a Councillor's role. The Duty to Involve aims to provide local people with additional opportunities to work closely with Councillors to influence decisions.

In the 2008 Place Survey (a postal survey with responses from 2,828 residents), 60% of residents said they do not know the name of their local Councillors. All age groups had limited confidence in being able to influence what goes on locally through councillors for a variety of reasons. These include:

- A lack of visibility within communities
- Difficulty accessing councillor surgeries
- A lack of clarity about the link between councillors and the Local Authority

As such, participants supported the idea of receiving information from their councillors and of having more contact – informal or formal – with them.

Councillors taking the lead role on engagement activity in their wards is fundamental to this strategy.

Through surgeries and other contact with the community Councillors can help in raising greater public awareness of the opportunities to engage in local decision-making and encourage more people to put themselves forward for civic roles.

In their role as community leaders, Councillors will be provided with the following specific support:

7. **Ward-based intelligence, information and customer insight:** Ward profiles will be provided annually to all Councillors.

In addition, Councillors will be provided with a monthly update about what is

happening in each ward. Both Local Authority officers and key partners will ensure that Councillors are informed of issues, initiatives, changes and success stories relating to their ward.

8. **Individual Councillor budgets:** It is intended that Councillors should have small individual budgets to spend locally in their wards.

Councillor budgets will provide a non-bureaucratic system of allocating funds to causes of their choice based on community requests. It is suggested that Councillors work with local communities in deciding how the money should be spent.

9. **Support for scrutiny, Councillor Call for Action and response to petitions:** Central Bedfordshire is committed to a robust, collaborative, outward facing model of scrutiny for each of its four committees – contributing to both policy development and performance management. Overview & Scrutiny will provide councillors with further opportunities to engage with the community and involve more people to influence Local Authority decisions.

Legislation enables Overview and Scrutiny Committees to be able to review the actions of all public sector providers, including those in the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), and hold them to account. The exception to this is the Children's Trust which is a statutory body where partners hold each other to account. The Children's Trust will publish an annual report each year which will be the subject of Scrutiny. In addition, the Scrutiny Committee of the Council can call to account relevant partners as to their contribution to the Children and Young People's Plan. The Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services will bring the Children's Trust annual report to Scrutiny. The local authority leader and Chief Executive must sign off annually that partnership arrangements in Children's Services are working well. The Local Authority and Councillors should consider involving residents, voluntary and community organisations, businesses and service users in identifying issues for scrutiny and develop a work programme which has the input of local communities and LSP partners.

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) gives all Councillors the powers to require local service providers to respond to an issue of concern. Where a response is not adequate, Councillors can refer the matter to Overview and Scrutiny.

Councillors also have a role to play in relation to petitions. The upcoming Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 proposes a duty on local authorities to respond to all petitions, including e-petitions, that relate to services they are responsible for and services where they share delivery responsibility. If Overview and Scrutiny decide there has been inadequate response to a petition, then the matter will be referred to the full Council for a public debate. And if five percent of the local population sign a petition, then it must be debated in full Council. Petitions will be noted as one of the evidence sources for the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

10. **Greater role and involvement in partnerships:** It is accepted that Councillors need support to act as 'connectors' between communities, the Local Authority and partners/partnerships. Councillors need recognition of their role to influence strategic decisions and take action in support of their ward interests.

11. **Establish links with Third Sector organisations:** The sector recognises that there is a clear distinction between the representative role of elected Councillors and their own role as Third Sector representatives, which is supportive of local democracy and adds value to the work of local Councillors.
12. **Case management system for Councillors:** Central Bedfordshire Council is preparing to implement a Member case management system to enable Councillors to respond to individuals more efficiently. The system should also be able to provide reports on issues and trends so that issues can be addressed more generally.
13. **Member development of community engagement skills:** The Member Development Strategy will include training to build on Councillors' engagement skills such as facilitation skills, consensus building skills, equality training, chairing community forums and public meetings. It will also build on Councillors' knowledge of their communities and the new statutory duties to involve, promote democracy and ensure equality.
14. **Dedicated officer support:** To support ward Councillors, a dedicated telephone number for the helpdesk, will be put in place to speed up response times.

Principle Three: Enhancing the role of Town and Parish Councils

This strategy seeks to empower communities at the neighbourhood level. This includes:

15. **Community-led planning (Parish Plans, Town Plans and Neighbourhood Plans):** Community-led planning is a step-by-step structured process of creating a vision and priorities for the future of a community or neighbourhood. The process and outcomes are owned by the whole community. Community-led planning provides communities with the means to tackle specific issues locally themselves, to voice their concerns and to outline their aspirations for public authorities to address.

The LSP through the Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership, will ensure they receive an annual progress report on community led planning across Central Bedfordshire. The LSP will use analysed community led planning data to inform the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

Community-led planning leads to service areas having a greater understanding of individual localities. It provides evidence for Councillors of local conditions, priorities and issues and provides an opportunity for closer participation at a very local level. The process can also bring together different communities in the locality, thereby improving cohesion.

There is already a well developed process for parish planning. There are 71 Town and Parish Councils and seven Parish Meetings in the Central Bedfordshire area. Of those, over half are currently active in the process of creating, finalising or showing an interest in parish plans. Where a Town or Parish Council wants a Plan this will be encouraged.

The Local Authority recognises that there is no one size fits all approach to the management of town centres. The decision on whether a town has a Town Centre Management Committee, or a broader Town Committee, will be determined by the relevant Town Council. Thereafter, the option for this to be a Joint Committee and part of Central Bedfordshire Council's constitution will be subject to joint discussion and agreement by both parties. The benefits of being included in the constitution are:

- a common understanding of the key issues;
- shared ownership and decision-making; and
- strong links with the Local Authority's Executive to influence policy and strategy.

Where a Town Council decides not to have a Town Centre Management Committee, the Local Authority will continue to work in partnership with the Town Council on developing its retail centre.

For each Town Centre Committee/Partnership, upon request, a senior officer from the Local Authority will be identified to attend meetings on a regular basis and be the single point of contact for Town Centre issues. Each Partnership will be encouraged to develop a Town Centre Action Plan. The format and direction of this will be led by the partnership but, if required, assistance in developing the plans will be provided by Local Authority Officers. The Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth & Regeneration, assisted by relevant Local Authority Officers, will meet with the Chairs of the Town Centre Committees/Partnerships on a quarterly basis. This group will discuss common issues and ensure direct access to all of the Local Authority's service areas.

Neighbourhood Plans have been developed for the three priority areas of Downside, Parkside and Tithe Farm.

16. **Town and Parish Council Conferences:** The Local Authority has committed to hosting two Town and Parish Council Conferences each year. This will enable two way dialogue and agreement on any joint plans.
17. **Identifying opportunities for devolving services, and budgets, to Town and Parish Councils:** The Local Authority and its partners will work closely with Town and Parish Councils to devolve budgets for 'quality of life' services to those who want them and where the service will be enhanced by doing so. Each application to deliver a devolved service must be supported by a robust business case that demonstrates improved value for money.

Devolved budgets would be distributed by allocating the pro-rata costs for delivering the same service on a broader area-wide basis.

18. **Supporting clusters of Town and Parish Councils working together to resolve common issues:** Town and Parish Councils will be supported to work together on finding local solutions to common issues.
19. **Provide a key contact from Central Bedfordshire Council for each Town and Parish Council:** A key contact from the Local Authority will be named for each Town and Parish Council. Appropriate senior-level representation will be provided in response to requests for Local Authority attendance at Town and Parish Council meetings.

Principle Four: Building the capacity of local people to engage

To achieve effective engagement we need to ensure that, where necessary, we develop our citizens and communities to have the knowledge and skills to influence decision-making.

20. **Community Development - helping people to form or join groups that influence decisions:** Community development is the process of building people's knowledge,

skills, confidence and therefore a sense of empowerment. It enables people to act together on their common priorities, usually through the development of independent community organisations and networks, and with the support of community development workers within statutory or Third Sector organisations.

Disadvantaged communities need additional support to help them to access services though the complexity of public services and structures in their neighbourhoods and to tackle exclusion and poverty. Without active intervention and investment in community development the danger is that community engagement will reinforce unequal access and could lead to tensions.

The Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership will lead with the Community Engagement Delivery Group to develop a common approach to community development work, which can be provided by BRCC, Voluntary and Community Action, Groundwork and other organisations.

21. **Support the development and implementation of a Volunteering Strategy with the aim of increasing participation:** One of our Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets is to increase volunteering. This involves partners working together to develop and implement a volunteering strategy.

Volunteers could provide a useful resource for the community and partners in realising the vision of this strategy. Volunteers working alongside community engagement officers would provide capacity and local knowledge to design and deliver engagement activities. Officers working with volunteers will need training as will the volunteers working on community engagement. This training can be provided by Voluntary and Community Action, who will lead on developing the volunteering strategy. They are also able to support statutory, and other, partners to develop their own volunteer programmes.

The Local Authority will also be developing a volunteering strategy for young people as part of the Positive Contribution section of the Children and Young People's Plan.

22. **Three-year funding agreements with Third Sector organisations:** Third Sector organisations are already involved in local activities, and the new duties for authorities to respond to petitions and provide enhanced powers for overview and scrutiny will give third sector organisations increased opportunities to involve local people in influencing Local Authority decisions.

Third Sector organisations also encourage communities to take action themselves. This can range from informal activity, such as self-help groups for older people, to managing a community asset. These organisations can help to improve and fill gaps in public services.

Third sector organisations can also act as a useful conduit for contacting and engaging with vulnerable and marginalised groups, specifically the more hidden communities (e.g. transgender people).

Third sector groups should continue to be funded appropriately for their community engagement and development activities, particularly those able to reach out to marginalised and vulnerable communities.

Three-year funding agreements will enable Third Sector organisations to plan ahead, recruit, retain and train staff, and provide business continuity. In addition, Third Sector organisations are able to draw down central and regional funds directly and contribute in their own right to the partnership and the actions of this strategy.

23. **Support the development of a Third Sector Assembly:** This strategy supports the creation of a Third Sector Assembly. The Assembly will facilitate community involvement and consultation with the LSP and other partners. It will also have a role in empowering the Third Sector to have a strong voice and an active involvement in influencing strategic planning and service delivery decisions that shape the communities in which they operate.
24. **Pilot a learning programme for local people interested in civic participation and engagement:** We will identify under-represented groups of the community and the barriers to their participation and develop and pilot a modular learning programme that is experiential, flexible and learner-centred, and will develop the following competencies among participants:
 - Knowledge of 'how the public sector world works' – including specifics around local governance and decision-making processes across all public sector agencies
 - Understanding power & influence
 - Principles of citizenship and civil society
 - Collaboration and co-operation
 - Participatory budgeting
 - Practical skills development
 - Self-confidence
 - Assertiveness and making yourself heard
 - How to influence decisions and policies
 - ESOL with a citizenship core agenda

The programmes will be based on the national Take Part framework, and we will learn from Pathfinder Hubs. Opportunities will include shadowing, mentoring, interactive workshops and visits to see local governance in action. The programme will also signpost participants to available active citizenship opportunities.

25. **Projects to develop the engagement capacity of young people:** Young people need to be encouraged to participate as they are often underrepresented in engagement activities. It is important to encourage their participation from an early age so as adults they continue to feel able to engage. A number of projects designed to increase the capacity of young people will be delivered as part of this strategy and the Children and Young Peoples Plan. These include, Local democracy week, Black History Month, youth thematic conferences and youth elections.
26. **Community Asset Transfer:** Public authorities are being encouraged to revitalise localities by passing buildings over to community control. This follows recommendations by the Quirk Review that showed the risks were worth it and that it empowered communities. Government has set up an Asset Transfer Unit to raise the profile of asset transfer, and offer information, advice and expert support to people across England.

The LSP partners will prepare a policy framework for asset transfer to build on current experience and best practice and provide a clear policy framework for responding to any requests for asset transfer. It should also include what safeguards

will be put in place to adequately protect those assets, and the capacity building measures to enable local communities to manage assets effectively.

Principle Five: Ensuring a strategic and joined-up, coordinated partnership approach

By sharing opportunities, resources and learning with partners and across directorates, we will save money, avoid duplication, and reduce engagement fatigue for our communities. In doing so we will also develop a clear and consistent 'One View' about what our communities really want.

27. **Implement the partnership's communication plan:** The LSP has agreed a communications strategy to ensure that key audiences are informed and involved in its work. The strategy was developed with representatives from the Bedfordshire Communications Network, including the Local Authority, Police, Fire, Health, Higher Education and the Third Sector. The strategy sets out a series of communications objectives and a range of actions for implementation.
28. **Develop a joint toolkit for consultation and engagement work:** This will involve building on the key principles set out above and consolidating any guidance already in place. Professionals working with the community have asked for a toolkit based on best practice nationally.

A network of community engagement practitioners in Central Bedfordshire will be established and they will meet twice per year to share good practice and learning and feed into the joint consultation and engagement plan.

29. **Joint consultation and engagement plan:** Individual partner organisations and Local Authority service teams will retain responsibility for specific consultations as part of a joint consultation plan, which will be developed and coordinated by the Community Engagement Delivery Group. The plan will be produced annually and continuously reviewed and updated.

Statutory sector partners should work together to develop and maintain a consultation database showing actual or anticipated start and end dates for planned consultation exercises, and contact details of those leading the exercise. This database could also be used to record participation levels (including minority and vulnerable groups) and evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches.

A shared consultation database will enable the partners to identify opportunities for joining up on consultation activity; reduce duplication and therefore consultation fatigue; share learning and consultation findings. The database should also be made available to the public via the internet to enable residents and stakeholders to find out about future consultations and how they can get involved and to also find out about the findings and outcomes from past consultations.

Each partner organisation will have its own communication plan and own programme of public engagement. However under this strategy the Community Engagement Delivery Group will identify which elements of the engagement programmes could be integrated or coordinated with others. The Delivery Group will publish a joint public engagement calendar of activities including dates of forthcoming consultations.

30. **Coordinating representation at community events:** The role of the Community Engagement Officers will be to coordinate community engagement activity within the

Local Authority and with partners. Opportunities to promote the Local Authority, its services, partner services and engage with the public should be maximised. The officers will identify the main community events in their area and coordinate Local Authority service representatives to ensure that the three frontline directorates are always represented. The Councillors will be notified of all events in their wards and invited to attend. Partners will also be notified. The team will also coordinate an exhibition/stand as often as possible at each of the seven main town centres.

31. **Shared stakeholder database:** Partner organisations have a number of stakeholder and community contact databases held separately. The Community Engagement Manager will lead on building a consolidated stakeholder database, which is updated automatically whenever the individually held databases are updated.

As part of this project partners will investigate the possibility of implementing a suitable software system, which will enable community organisations to access the database and communicate more easily with partner organisations.

32. **Shared community intelligence, information and customer insight:** It is recommended that partner organisations consider investment in a joint system to share appropriate data, information and intelligence relating to Central Bedfordshire and its communities. This central repository will improve access to information and promote the consistent use of intelligence to support our strategic decision-making. Parts of the system could be accessed by the public (as appropriate) whilst secure access could be made available to partners as necessary. This system could be developed into an interactive website for residents to provide local information.

33. **Partner learning programme:** When commissioning external training on consultation and engagement skills, partners will be asked to consider inviting other partners to join to maximise the benefits of training and provide better value for money on training.

34. **Reporting to residents on the impact of engagement:** In addition to other communication and feedback, there will be an annual consolidated report to residents on the nature, scale and outcome of engagement activities in the previous year.

35. **Pilot an approach for joint and devolved partnership working that tests the delivery of collaborative working between the partners:** Engagement should reflect what our communities want to influence and include a clear, published framework that explains how we will enable them to do so. This should include key issues residents have told us are the most important to them, such as crime, roads and growth (jobs and housing density). The LSP Board should identify a key local theme and use this to set up and test a local consultation approach.

7. Structures to support community engagement

Coordination of Community Engagement Work

To deliver this strategy effectively it is proposed that a Community Engagement Manager be appointed to work with officers and partners involved in community engagement. The focus of this work will be to:

- manage the day-to-day implementation of this strategy;
- monitor quality and evaluate the impact of consultation and community engagement;

- share/disseminate learning and build capacity to deliver effective community engagement;
- coordinate consultation and engagement activities with partners and across Local Authority directorates;
- assist (as appropriate) with the design and delivery of community engagement activities; particularly in setting up and supporting mechanisms to engage with minority or vulnerable groups; and
- support ward Councillors in carrying out their community leadership role, including the provision of appropriate information, intelligence and community insight.

8. How success will be measured

The Local Strategic Partnership is committed to engaging with local communities and has agreed the following, to measure the success of this strategy:

- Evaluating all engagement and consultation activities, including accessing participation levels and involvement of minority groups, and those disadvantaged by deprivation eg. poverty.
- Annual residents' survey (including the biannual Place Survey) to measure achievement of three of our Local Area Agreement targets:
 - To increase the percentage of residents who participate in civic activities from 12.6% to 16.2% (*National Indicator 3*);
 - To increase the percentage of residents who feel that they can influence decisions affecting their locality from 23.8% to 28% (*National Indicator 4*);
 - To increase the percentage of people who say that they participate in regular volunteering from 24.3% to 27.1% (*National Indicator 6*).
- National Place Survey every two years.
 - In the 2008 Place Survey (a postal survey with 2,828 responses), residents told us that:
 - 60% do not feel informed about how to make a complaint;
 - 57% do not feel informed about how to get involved in local decision making;
 - 34% agree Central Bedfordshire Council listens to the concerns of residents;
 - 33% agree Central Bedfordshire Council act on the concerns of local residents; and
 - 30% agree that they can have an influence on local decision (*National Indicator 4*), 60% disagree;
 - 60% said they do not know the name of their local Councillors.
- Comprehensive Area Assessment.
- Evaluating the outcome of local participatory budgeting projects.
- Feedback from ward Councillors and Town and Parish Councils.
- National and local Third Sector survey data.
- Scrutiny by the Local Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, including monitoring the use of Petitions and Councillor Calls for Action and participation of the public in scrutiny work.
- Evaluating customer feedback.

9. Our values in delivering the strategy

This strategy provides for a consistent approach for consultation on Local Authority and partner activity whilst recognising that one size will not fit all when engaging communities.

We recognise that people are busy and life can be stressful and we want to make sure that engagement is meaningful and rewarding.

We want to ensure that public engagement is undertaken with a clear sense of purpose. We will use the best practice methods for gathering the views of our communities. We want to build on the skills and knowledge of all those currently involved in engagement work including Councillors, partners and officers of the Local Authority. We want to ensure that there is a commitment to learning for continuous improvement.

With this in mind all community engagement work in Central Bedfordshire should be:

- **Planned:** engagement and consultation activities should be well planned in terms of the approach, principles and methods used.
- **Timely:** engagement and consultation should be timely, begun at the earliest appropriate time and that all who express an interest have the time to ensure their views are heard.
- **Transparent:** the rationale for engagement and consultation and what is and is not open to influence and change should be made clear. Engagement and consultation should be genuinely open to influence and change, be meaningful and undertaken without preconceptions.
- **Inclusive:** engagement should be broadly representative of those that would be affected by the decisions that might result from engagement. Careful consideration should be given to who will be engaged, so as to be as inclusive as possible, whilst bearing in mind the need to take proactive steps to genuinely engage minority and vulnerable sections of the community.
- **Proportionate:** the nature, scale and scope of each engagement and consultation activity should be proportionate to the resources available and the scale of the outcomes.
- **Resourced:** careful consideration should be given, on a case by case basis, to any resource implications and the most appropriate methods used to avoid duplication and ensure value for money.
- **Evaluated:** review and evaluation will be built in to all engagement and consultation work.
- **Published:** outcomes of all engagement and consultation work will be publicised and participants given feedback on the outcomes.

These principles are consistent with the Bedfordshire and Luton Compact¹ (*Getting it right together*).

¹ The Compact is the agreement between local statutory organisations and the local voluntary and community sector to improve their relationship for the benefit of each other and the communities they serve. The Compact was adopted by the LSP in April 2009.

Delivery Plan - Community Engagement Strategy, Implementation

Purpose:

The aim of this Community Engagement Strategy is to deliver greater added value to our citizens by understanding their needs and issues, and giving them a greater involvement in the decision-making process and access to public sector services. The strategy is based on five key principles, and this delivery plan outlines the deliverables for each principle.

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PRINCIPLE: Giving more people more opportunities to influence decisions

	Key Activities (Description)	Deliverables (Output)	Lead Officer	Milestones	Outcomes
1	Develop a joint E-Panel for Citizens	Recruit circa 800 residents to a new electronic citizens panel.	Consultation Manager	Year 1 Recruitment completed by September	Will provide a source of people to feedback to the public services re prevailing issues via online surveys and discussions. Active involvement and engagement in local issues by residents.
		This panel could be extended to include all of the major public agencies and Bedford and Luton authorities.	Consultation Manager	Years 2-3	Better use of resources and coordination of cross border engagement.
2	Petitions and E Petitions	Information about Petitions their purpose and how local people can use them will be circulated by a variety of means, newsletters/ website etc.	Head of Democratic Services, External Comms Manager	Year 1- by 15 th December 2010	An opportunity for local people to raise concerns and raise local issues. Opportunity for local people to set agendas that matter to them.

		Mechanisms will be put in place to receive and respond appropriately to any petitions coming forward.	Democratic Services team		Residents feel better able to influence decisions.
3	Scrutiny	Explore the best ways for the community to contribute to the overview and scrutiny function of the local authority.	Corporate Scrutiny Manager	Year 2	Residents feel better able to influence decisions.
4	Specialist Forums and Citizen Governance	Map and provide an analysis of existing forums their remit and purpose.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement and Voluntary Sector Leads	Year 1	A clear picture of what currently exists within Central Bedfordshire. Identification of any gaps that may exist and recommendations about other activity that could be put in place to ensure that all have opportunities to contribute.
		Implement the six national standards set out by the Tenants Services Authority	Tenant Involvement Manager	Year 1 June-Sept Consultation October Annual report	Identification of any duplication within the current arrangements.
5	Sustainable Communities Act	Publicise the use of the Act in the Local Authority (and amongst other partners) via newsletters and publications. Prompt suggestions from residents, community groups and others on how it could be used. Seek the views of councillors about issues in their communities. Identify an appropriate panel of local representatives to review the proposals.	Consultation Manager, Engagement Manager, External Comms Manager, Assistant Directors in Sustainable Communities	Year 1 – depending upon national policy	Communities have information which they can act upon if they choose, and are involved in the design of those opportunities. Local Community champions engaged in the process. Community reviews and sets the agenda for any issues to be taken forward.

6	Social Networking	Establish a partnership website/ social networking place where online forums can gather views and generate discussions about prevailing local issues. This could be extended to include other partners.	Consultation Manager	Year 1 June - December	Further opportunity and way for local people to be engaged and contribute views.
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PRINCIPLE: Enabling Councillors to be leaders in and for their communities					
	Key Activities (Description)	Deliverables (Output)	Lead Officer	Milestones	Outcomes
7	Provide Councillors with relevant ward-based intelligence, information and customer insight	Issue and update Central Bedfordshire crib sheet (area profile).	Customer & Community Insight Manager	Updated quarterly	Enables consistent use of facts and figures about the area to inform decision-making, particularly at a ward level.
		Issue and update ward based profiles.	Customer & Community Insight Manager	Updated annually (April)	
		Monthly update by email to all Councillors to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completed, current and future Local Authority consultations; • complaints to the Local Authority; • community events (e.g. fetes and shows); • Town and Parish Council meetings; • Key partnership meetings; • Grants available to communities; and • Partner consultation & engagement activities. 	Customer & Community Insight Manager and Engagement Manager	Pilot with a small number of Councillors before a full roll out from September 2010	Ensure Councillors are well informed about activities taking place, or planned, in the wards they represent. Enable Councillors to play a lead role in and for their communities.
		Develop a web page for each ward to include all ward specific information listed above.	Web Content Manager, Customer & Community Insight Manager and Engagement Manager	By Dec 2010	

		Issue a “handy guide” to the main Local Authority services (particularly Planning and Highways).	Engagement Manager and HOS Highways	By Sept 2010	Ensure Councillors understand how communities can influence those things that matter to them most.
8	Individual Councillor budgets	Identify sources of discretionary spend from within the Local Authority that could be diverted to fund Individual Councillor Budgets.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	Year 2	Enables Councillors to play a lead role in supporting their local communities.
		Issue guidelines to help Councillors in their decision making about how to spend the money.			
		Develop a record keeping system for recording how the budgets have been sent.			
		Review budget allowance and process.			
9	Support for scrutiny, Councillor Call for Action and response to petitions	Develop a “handy guide” for Councillors and the public on the variety of methods communities can use to raise issues with the Local Authority (e.g. CCfA, petitions, SCA).	Engagement Manager and Democratic Services	By Sept 2010	Ensure Councillors understand how communities can raise issues.
10	Greater role and involvement in partnerships	Develop a “handy guide” to key partnerships in Central Bedfordshire.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement and Engagement Manager	By Sept 2010	Enable Councillors to understand what partnerships exist, what their remit is and how they can get involved.
		Develop a partnership newsletter and include all ward Councillors in the distribution list.	Partnership Adviser	Quarterly, starting in May 2010	

		Ensure the early involvement of Councillors in the major decisions made by the LSP, such as the LAA and Sustainable Community Strategy.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	From April 2010	Improved partnership working, delivering better outcomes for local people.
		Ward members to be invited to Central Bedfordshire Forum meetings.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	Date of next Forum to be agreed	
11	Establish links with Third Sector organisations	Develop a "handy guide" to the third sector in Central Bedfordshire and the Compact Agreement.	Engagement Manager, and Voluntary and Community Action	By Sept 2010	
		Keep members informed of key issues affecting the third sector (to be included in the partnership newsletter).	Partnership Adviser	From May 2010	
12	Case management system for Councillors	Continue to research a case management system and present to Councillors for a final decision.	Customer Relations Manager	Years 2-3	

13	Member development of community engagement skills	<p>Develop Councillor briefing sessions on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT skills (email, calendar, internet, PDA); • Statutory duties and role of Members in community engagement; • How to scrutinise consultation / community engagement; • Understanding cultural differences; • Listening skills; • Conflict resolution; • How to say no; • Facilitation skills; • Chairing public meetings; and • Consensus building. 	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement and Head of Democratic Services		
14	Dedicated officer support	Set up a dedicated telephone number for the helpdesk for Councillors to use to ensure a fast response.	Head of Customer Services	Year 1	

PRINCIPLE: Enhancing the role of Town & Parish Councils					
	Key Activities (Description)	Deliverables (Output)	Lead Officer	Milestones	Outcomes
15	Community-led planning, including Town Centre Management and Neighbourhood Plans for Priority Estates	Encourage and support the development of community-led plans (Town & Parish Plans).	Community Involvement Team Leader	Year 1	Involve residents in determining local priorities for their own communities.
		Develop a mechanism to ensure community issues raised in the plans are used to inform local strategies, policies and plans.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	Year 1	Develop community insight to inform policies and plans.
		All Town Councils to be formally contacted by Central Bedfordshire Council by end of May 2010 to invite them to develop a Town Centre Partnership.	Business Growth Manager	Year 1	Town Councils will be able to determine the best approach to town centre management in their areas.
		Options for constitutional links to Central Bedfordshire Town Centre Action Plans in place by end of July 2010, for those that wish to have them.			
		Where necessary, Officer Groups will be set up and the first meetings scheduled by September 2010.			

		<p>Existing Neighbourhood plans (Downside and Parkside /Tithe Farm) are linked to LSP plans and targets and in particular the work of thematic/statutory partnerships.</p> <p>Specific targets in the plans to be monitored by the LSP's thematic/statutory partnerships.</p>	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement and Engagement Manager	Year 1 from October 2010	<p>Helps reduce inequality by integrating the work in the neighbourhood plans into that of the LSP strategic planning and delivery.</p> <p>Ensures that the most deprived areas in the authority are included in mainstream planning and delivery.</p>
16	Town & Parish Council Conferences	<p>Two Town and Parish Council conferences will be held each year.</p> <p>A detailed report will be provided following each event. Feedback on any actions taken will be provided at subsequent events.</p>	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	Year 1, 2, and 3	<p>Engagement between partners and Town and Parish Councils Issues of joint concern raised and discussed.</p> <p>Integrates local level activity with the vision and priorities in the Sustainable Community Strategy.</p>
17	Identifying opportunities for devolving services and budgets to Town & Parish Councils	Work with Town/ Parish Councils to test and pilot the viability of service and budget devolution.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	Year 1	Enables communities to determine for themselves how services in their area should be delivered.
		Further opportunities for devolving services identified and would build upon lessons learned from pilot / case study.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	Year 2 and 3	

PRINCIPLE: Building the capacity of local people to engage					
	Key Activities (Description)	Deliverables (Output)	Lead Officer	Milestones	Outcomes
20	Community Development – helping people to form or join groups that influence decisions	Identify opportunities for people to be involved in, inform and influence decision making.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	Year 1	Directory of forums and structures that exist within the authority area.
		Identify people who are or want to get involved in local decision making activities/ opportunities through volunteering.	Third sector partners	Year 1	Poll of people to engage or include in local consultation and engagement activities.
		Explore the option of establishing an active citizen hub which coordinates and supports the involvement of local people in the work of partners and the partnership.	Third sector partners	Year 2	
21	Support the development and implementation of a Volunteering Strategy with the aim of increasing participation	Create a volunteering strategy for the partnership.	Director, Voluntary and Community Action	Year 1	Framework that sets out the partnership's aims in recruiting and involving volunteers.

22	Three Year funding agreements with Third Sector organisations	Agree three year funding agreements.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	Year 2	More secure and sustainable core funding for third sector organisations. Medium term investment in staff and resources. Secure funding for organisations which carry out engagement and development activities.
23	Support the development of a Third Sector Assembly	Continue to support the programme of the Third Sector assemblies. Use the Assembly to promote and facilitate opportunities for joint activity between and across organisations.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement and Voluntary & Community Action	Year 1, 2 and 3	Broaden the structured engagement of third sector organisations. Mechanism for bringing forward broad and inclusive representation from the third sector to the LSP.
24	Pilot a learning programme for local people interested in civic participation and engagement	Identify learning needs of those people and organisations involved in local decision making structures.	Head of Partnerships and	Year 2	Basis for pilot programme established.
		Design a pilot programme and seek funding to meet those needs.	Community Engagement with the Stronger Communities Partnership Theme Lead and Community Engagement Delivery Group	Year 3	Programme tested and evaluated Lessons learned are used to put in place future programmes.

25	Projects to develop the engagement capacity of young people	Links made and support provided to the Children's Trust and others working with young people in both formal and informal environments (e.g. Youth Parliament).	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	Years 1, 2 and 3	Young people included in partnership deliberation, their voices heard and influence felt in activities and service delivery.
26	Community Asset Transfer	Town and Parish Councils and third sector organisations to identify if there are local assets in their community that may benefit from transfer to community management. Feasibility process undertaken as to whether proposals brought forward are viable and tenable for transfer, and ensure appropriate safeguards are put in place to protect those assets.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement and Head of Integrated Youth Support	Year 1,2 and 3	System established to test the viability of any transfer opportunity.

PRINCIPLE: Ensuring a strategic and joined up, coordinated partnership approach					
	Key Activities (Description)	Deliverables (Output)	Lead Officer	Milestones	Outcomes
27	Implement the partnership's communication plan	Produce an implementation plan.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement and AD Communications	Year 1 September – December 2010	Communication plan is owned by and will reflect the views of all partners.
28	Develop a joint toolkit for consultation and engagement work	Review current local practice, including the skills of local practitioners and arrangements for training to use licensed products.	Community Engagement Delivery Group and Engagement Manager	Year 1 September-December 2010	Acknowledge good local practice.
		Review good engagement practice in other places.	Community Engagement Delivery Group and Engagement Manager	Year 1 September – December 2010	Make use of relevant good practice elsewhere.
		Develop and devise a toolkit appropriate to Central Bedfordshire.	Community Engagement Delivery Group, Engagement Manager and Consultation Manager	Year 1 January - March	A toolkit for all partners to ensure quality and a consistent approach.

29	Joint consultation and engagement plan	Produce an annual plan that sets out planned Local Authority and partner organisation's key consultation and engagement activities.	Community Engagement Delivery Group	Year 1	A joined up and coordinated approach amongst key partner organisations, leading to greater efficiency and effectiveness.
		Establish a shared consultation database	Consultation Manager	Year 2	Ensure coordination of consultation activity.
30	Coordinating representation at community events	Develop a directory of events and update as new events are programmed.	External Comms Manager	Year 1, 2, 3	Ensures that the right staff / officers attend the appropriate meetings through the year. Consistent approach to community relations.
		Coordinate representation at appropriate events.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement		
31	Establish Shared stakeholder database	Create a shared database that links engagement across the Local Authority.	Consultation Manager and External Comms Manager	Year 1	Having a shared database will enable the Local Authority and its partners to know who its communities are and how they can be contacted.
		Lead discussions with partners about consolidating all existing and relevant partner databases in to one and which retains links back to host partners own database.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement	Year 2	More efficient use of resources.
		Identify software that enables partners to make use of the contacts for engagement and consultation work.	Partner Communication Leads	Year 2	More efficient use of resources.
		Put in place a shared stakeholder database.	Partner Communication Leads	Year 2	Database will maintain records of the engagement undertaken and who has been involved so avoiding duplication and multiple targeting of groups and individuals.

32	Shared community intelligence information and community insight	Develop a joint system that is cross partnership and holds appropriate data, information and intelligence relating to Central Bedfordshire and its communities.	Customer & Community Insight Manager	Year 1 – development work Year 2-3	Improve access to information and promote the consistent use of intelligence to support strategic decision making.
33	Partner Learning Programme	Develop a learning programme for staff/ officers/ volunteers involved in engagement and partnership related work based on: Liaison with all partners about current learning needs and existing learning programme support; Identification of gaps in learning programme support; Design any additional and required joint learning programme needs and identify how they will be resourced and delivered.	Community Engagement Delivery Group, Engagement Manager and Learning & Development	Year 2-3	Upgrade the skills base of individuals across the partnership. Deliver joint training programmes (multi disciplinary) supporting the joint work undertaken on behalf of the partnership.
34	Reporting to residents on the impact of engagement	Mechanisms developed to feedback to residents on progress of engagement activity, outcomes and their involvement in the various engagement mechanisms (Cross reference to Communication Plan).	External Comms Manager	Year 2-3	Residents can see the impact of engagement.
35	Pilot an approach for joint and devolved partnership working that tests the delivery of collaborative working between the partners	Identify a key local theme (e.g. The Growth Agenda) and use this to set up and test a local consultation approach. Review and evaluate how well this works and identify lessons learned that can be fed into the Year 2 Delivery Plan.	Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement, Consultation Manager and Engagement Manager	Year 1 September 2010 – March 2011	Residents feel informed and involved in making decisions on issues that impact most on their quality of life