BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL and MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMITTEE: Joint Overview and Scrutiny	REPORT NUMBER: **JOS/18/27**
FROM: Councillor Maybury and Councillor Flatman	DATE OF MEETING: 19 November 2018
OFFICER: Tom Barker – Assistant Director Planning and Communities	KEY DECISION REF NO. Item No.

COMMUNITY STRATEGY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

1.   PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1   To enable Overview and Scrutiny Committee to inform the early engagement on the Councils' Community Strategy.

2.   OPTIONS CONSIDERED

2.1   To write the Community Strategy without any early engagement and involve stakeholders solely through a process of consultation once the document has been drafted.

2.2   To undertake an extensive process of stakeholder engagement involving workshops, public meetings and online surveys.

2.3   To concentrate resources on in-depth 'focus group' style engagement with a range of stakeholders through four sessions to be held with (a) internal staff; (b) external statutory and voluntary sector partners; (c) members of the community represented by a cross-section of winners from the recent 'Stars' awards; and (d) a cross-section of Councillors.

2.4   The first option would enable a document to be created quickly but would run the risk of developing something that does not have the 'ownership' required both within the organisation and among external stakeholders.

2.5   The second option would be likely to result in high levels of ownership. It would, however, place a high demand on resources and extend the engagement process over a lengthy period of time.

2.6   The third option is considered to find the right balance between timeliness and involvement. Focus groups are also considered likely to result in engagement that emphasises depth of conversation over breadth and should therefore provide more effective influence over the final document.

3.   RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1   That Committee endorse an engagement approach through use of focus groups involving (a) internal staff; (b) external statutory and voluntary sector partners; (c) members of the community represented by a cross-section of winners from the recent 'Stars' awards; and (d) a cross-section of Councillors.

3.2	That the draft Statement of Principles be endorsed as one of the building blocks in the creation of the Strategy.

REASON FOR DECISION

To inform and add-value to the engagement on the emerging Community Strategy.

4.   KEY INFORMATION

4.1   The creation of a Community Strategy has been articulated as one of the Organisational Priorities for 2018/19.

4.2   Neither Babergh or Mid Suffolk have an existing Community Strategy.

4.3   Work to develop a Strategy began during Spring 2018 but for a range of reasons, including staff absence, did not progress. In order to deliver a Strategy for adoption prior to the end of this financial year it is necessary to now move with significant pace.

4.4   In order to frame development of the Strategy some 'key principles' have been drafted along with some 'open questions' that will help clarify the focus and parameters of the document.

4.5   These were informally floated at the recent Town and Parish Liaison meetings to gauge initial thoughts and feedback. They have subsequently been discussed with Cabinet Members for Communities. Following these discussions, the draft principles have been further refined and additional questions have been added. The current working draft of these is included at Appendix 1.

4.6   In order to move at pace but also engage with people in a meaningful way it is suggested that resources are concentrated on in-depth 'focus group' style engagement with a range of stakeholders through four sessions to be held with (a) internal staff; (b) external statutory and voluntary sector partners; (c) members of the community represented by a cross-section of winners from the recent 'Stars' awards; and (d) a cross-section of Councillors.

4.7   The outcomes from these focus groups will inform the Strategy that will be presented to Cabinet in draft form in January ahead of more formal consultation during February and anticipated endorsement of a final Community Strategy in March 2018.

5.   LINKS TO JOINT STRATEGIC PLAN

5.1   The Community Strategy is heavily linked with the main priority area of Strong and Healthy Communities and in particular the key strategic outcome of Community capacity building and engagement to enable all communities to be thriving, growing, healthy, active and self-sufficient.

6.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The proposal would involve officer time but apart from potential room-booking costs, which would be negligible, there are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

7.   LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1   There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8.   RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1   This report is most closely linked with the Council's Corporate / Significant Business Risk No. 3a – *a lack of effective engagement with communities to understand their future needs would mean that we may not be able to help communities become more sustainable*. Key risks associated with this report are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
Moving at pace could mean that staff, external stakeholders and community representatives do not feel 'engaged' in the development of the Strategy	2	2	Use of focus groups will enable in-depth discussion with key individuals and there will be a period of more formal consultation early in 2019.

9.   CONSULTATIONS

9.1   There has been some soft engagement on the emerging policy through the Town and Parish Liaison Meetings in October 2018 but there has not yet been any formal consultation.

10.   EQUALITY ANALYSIS

The Community Strategy itself will require an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) but an EIA is not required for this report because the contents of the report will have no impact on persons covered by the protected characteristics - age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

11.   ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1   There are no environmental implications arising from the report.

12.   APPENDICES

Title	Location
(a) Draft Statement of Principles for the Community Strategy	Attached

13.   BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS *(Papers relied on to write the report but which are not published and do not contain exempt information)*

13.1   The Government's Civil Society Strategy: building a future that works for everyone - https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-society-strategy-building-a-future-that-works-for-everyone

13.2   A connected society: a strategy for tackling loneliness - https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness

13.3   New Local Government Network (NLGN) insight report: Transforming the relationship between Councils and Communities - http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/wp-content/uploads/Transforming-the-Relationship-Between-Councils-and-Communities_Insights-Report_-OCT-2018.pdf

Statement of Principles for the Community Strategy

Community Strategy Purpose:

To define what the Councils' strategic approach needs to be in order to ensure that all our places 'work' for now and in the future. It should help us decide what powers can we bring to helping resolve local issues, where and when should we intervene and, importantly, when should we just get out of the way to allow our communities to deliver for themselves.

The following principles will underpin the development of the Community Strategy:

- The empowerment of individuals, families and communities and the long-term sustainability of our communities

- The enhancement of consistent and effective engagement with our communities and across all Council services

- The development and maintenance of systems for gathering data and intelligence which is used to inform decision-making and reflects the 'Suffolk now and +20 years' evidence base

- Effective collaboration between the community and the voluntary sector, statutory partners and other agencies [something here about recognising and valuing Parish Councils as the most local tier of Local Government – developing a more mutually appreciative relationship that places priority on subsidiarity – triple devolution?]

- The development of strategies, policies and other initiatives which explore the potential for communities to play a far more significant role in the design, commissioning and delivery of public services

- To help address social exclusion, the harder to reach [and hear] and the impacts of [diminishing] social mobility by developing support mechanisms which help them to gain confidence and independence

- To strengthening the approach to prevention, to reduce demand on all our services and to ensure that our diminishing resources are targeted to those who need them most

Its emphasis is:

- To retain the trust and confidence of our communities and to develop an awareness of and enthusiasm for what they can achieve themselves

- To allow disadvantaged or marginalised members of our communities access to the benefits of community-based interventions that improve their quality of lives

- To provide a physical environment that is safe, healthy and inclusive

- To enable everyone to participate in decisions that affect their lives [to the extent their lives are affected.]

- To provide an evidence base and key trends (for instance, economy, demography, physical health, mental health, housing, inequalities, welfare reform) which is needed to support the Council's strategic plans

Its operating model is based on:

- The asset-based community development approach that

  1. Gathers intelligence and information about a community to establish their strengths
  2. Establishes what is important for that community so we can build more meaningful relationships and greater credibility.
  3. Supports local solutions and help build on the things already happening so they are owned locally and go further.
  4. Removes unnecessary barriers and build in long term sustainability so that we adopt a new way of thinking which can be mainstreamed into day to day working

- A focus on place or locality which provides momentum and long-term trust which is shared within the organisation and used to inform other aspects of its business

- Principles of effective community engagement and participation and service co-design [important these aren't just words, requires cultural shift across sector away from benevolent professional paternalism to recognition that local individuals and communities provide value through their understanding of the bespoke circumstances within any given community.]

- An integrated and sustainable approach to service delivery, which ensures that services are delivered in the interests of place and local people first and foremost and which works towards reducing demand in the future.

Some open questions:

Should the Community Strategy define our approach to "Place"? – ie should it define an approach to pooled budgets across Statutory bodies? Should we be looking at participatory budgets? Would this involve formal governance structures?

Is this strategy the place to explore devolved decision-making (ie planning decisions made by Town / Parish Councils)?

To what extent should we expect the strategy to be 'jointly owned' by statutory partners? Or should it be more about articulating how we can help join the dots?

If we are looking for communities to play a more significant role in the design, commissioning and delivery of public services are Town and Parish Councils well-placed to facilitate this? This would provide a geographic basis for those conversations but what role for communities of interest?

Should the Strategy articulate the approach to all engagement activities across all District Council functions (ie service consultations)? What is its relationship to other policies and approaches, for example the Planning-related 'Statement of Community Involvement'? Should it seek to 'trespass' upon statutory requirements such as publication of committee reports?

Some organisations work directly with vulnerable individuals. In terms of building capacity and supporting the vulnerable, is the Councils role to work directly with identified individuals or to support voluntary sector organisations who will directly support the individual?

Demand for support will inevitably be greater than the capacity available. How will the strategy enable Officers to make judgements about what will – and importantly will not – be supported?

How can the strategy help achieve the right balance between 'subject specialisms' and community development support for localities? Or are those operational questions that come after the strategy?

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