

Community Engagement Policies

Principle 1: Supporting local people to engage, inform and influence decisions to help shape their communities.

Policy Statements

Consultation:

- All consultations undertaken by the Council, or on our behalf, should be registered on the consultation database. Officers should inform the Communications Team and seek appropriate advice.
- Officers should refer to the consultation toolkit and ensure compliance with the Bedfordshire and Luton Compact, Small Business Engagement Accord and the Government's Code of Practice on Consultation.
- Wherever possible, consultations on formal written consultation documents should allow a period of 12 weeks for written responses.
- Consultation should only take place where there is a statutory requirement to do so and/or where the outcome of the consultation will influence or inform the decision.
- In accordance with the requirements of the Equality Duty, accurate details of any engagement activity, including who has been engaged, how, and the outcome must be recorded and published.
- Officers should use a variety of mechanisms for community engagement to ensure all sections of the community can participate.
- The Council is committed to engaging individuals, interest groups and stakeholders in the planning process. All planning applications and planning documents are required by law to be consulted upon and the requirements are set out in the Statement of Community Involvement which was adopted by the Council in October 2012.

Scrutiny:

- The Council will aim to have at least two investigations per year which involve significant public participation

Forums:

- When a new engagement forum is created this should be entered onto the stakeholder database to enable any Council services and partners to consult and engage with all sections of the community.

Let's Talk Together:

- Officers will support individual or clusters of town and parish councils with their local community engagement activity to promote consultation and involvement in tackling local issues.

Principle 2: Enabling Ward Members to be leaders in and for their communities

Policy Statements

Profiles:

- Ward and Town profiles will be provided annually to all Members.

Inform:

- Officers must inform the Executive Member and relevant Ward Members of any area based issues that they are working on, including any consultation or engagement activities taking place, in their wards / towns or likely to impact upon them.
- Officers should seek the advice and involvement of the Executive Member and the Ward Members in the affected wards / towns at the outset.
- Ward members will be informed if an officer is attending a Parish / Town Council meeting in their ward / town.

Support:

- Members will be provided with a short strategic update document in advance of their attendance at town and parish council meetings.

Principle 3: Enhancing the role of town and parish councils

Policy Statements

Communication and response:

- Officers should inform town and parish council clerks and chairs of any consultation or engagement activity taking place in or likely to impact on their parishes, and where appropriate seek their advice and involvement.
- Officers should use the contact details for clerks and chairs in Outlook when using email. Officers should be aware that not all clerks and chairs have an

email address, so written communication should also be provided using the contact details on the stakeholder database.

- Ward Members will be the named key contact on behalf of the Council for communication with town and parish councils.
- Where a request from a town or parish council is made to an officer a response will be provided within 5 working days, in accordance with the Council's Customer Charter.

Neighbourhood Plans:

- Planning officers will support town and parish councils to develop their Neighbourhood Plan with technical advice. Once the plan is written, the Council will check it against planning policy and procedures, publish it for comments over a six week period and then submit it for an independent check.. Central Bedfordshire Council will then arrange for a referendum in the local area and if agreed by the majority, the Council will adopt it.

Conferences:

- The Council will hold two Town and Parish Council Conferences each year and where relevant separate events will be held for town councils and parish councils

Devolving Services:

- Officers must inform the Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement of any requests or plans relating to the devolvement of a service, along with the relevant Member(s).
- Any requests to devolve a service to a town or parish council must be supported by a strong business case that demonstrates improved value for money.
- Where a budget is to be transferred with a devolved service this will be distributed by allocating the pro rata costs for delivering the same service on a broader area-wide basis (after taking into account any planned budget cuts or service remodelling).
- Where appropriate, the transfer of services should follow a commissioning or tendering procurement process.
- Where consideration is being given to stop or significantly reduce a service the relevant town and parish councils it impacts upon should be informed at the outset.
- Any work to explore alternative options in terms of transferring responsibilities for a service away from the Council will be agreed by the relevant Executive Member and Director (or their nominee) with final decisions being taken in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

Principle 4: Enabling more services to be delivered locally

Policy Statements

Third Sector Assembly:

- The Council will use Third Sector Assembly to consult and involve voluntary and community organisations in the planning, shaping and design of services.

Localism:

- The Council has developed processes to deliver the Community Right to Challenge and Community Right to Bid. These can be accessed via the strategy document.

Principle 5: Enabling employers to thrive and play an active role in their local community

Policy Statements

Business Engagement

- The Council will adopt a “can do” approach when engaging with local businesses. Every effort should be made to understand and respond to their needs and issues and help create the right conditions for business growth and success in Central Bedfordshire.