

CABINET

22 November 2011

Title: Community Engagement and Empowerment Strategy 2011-2014	
REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CRIME, JUSTICE AND COMMUNITIES	
Open report	For Decision
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: No
Report Author: Heather Wills, Divisional Director Corporate Policy & Public Affairs	Contact Details: Tel: 020 8227 2786 E-mail: heather.wills@lbbd.gov.uk
Accountable Divisional Director: Heather Wills, Divisional Director Corporate Policy & Public Affairs	
Accountable Director: Stella Manzie, Chief Executive	
Summary: The Council has a strong track record of engaging effectively and imaginatively with local people to inform service delivery and design. Elected Members, in their roles as community leaders play a crucial role in engaging with local people and supporting them to play a part in addressing local issues. It is important that the Council is consistent in adopting best practice in engaging with and empowering local people, so that everyone who wants to can have their say. This strategy aims to ensure that the Council consistently follows some key principles when it engages with local people, and makes the most of new opportunities to involve people effectively.	
Recommendation(s) The Cabinet is recommended to: (i) Adopt the Community Engagement and Empowerment Strategy 2011-2014 attached as Appendix 1 to this report	
Reason(s) To support the Council to achieve its policy theme of 'Better Together, and its underpinning aim of being a well-run organisation.	

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Council has a strong track record in engaging with residents and businesses to seek their views, to inform service planning, and in involving people in developing new services. Community Housing Partnerships, Friends of Parks, equalities

forums are all ways in which the Council regularly consults, engages with and involved local people (a fuller, but not comprehensive list appears at Appendix 2 of the strategy attached at Appendix 1 to this report).

- 1.2 In challenging financial times, it is more important than ever that the services provided by the Council meet the needs as closely as possible of those they are designed to serve – and that when difficult decisions are taken, local people have the chance to have their say. There is also increasingly more scope for local people to play a part in designing, managing and delivering local services.
- 1.3 It is also important that the Council can clearly state, to local residents, to Government and to its other stakeholders, including voluntary and community organisations, its commitment to effective engagement, and set out its plans for improvement.
- 1.4 In Spring 2010, the Council with a range of partners participated in an exercise led by the IDeA to conduct a self-assessment against a benchmark of good practice in engagement and empowerment work. The findings of that exercise have informed the development of this strategy.

2. Proposal and Issues

2.1 A draft strategy for engagement and empowerment for the Council appears at Appendix 1. The strategy aims to clarify why effective engagement and involvement is important, the principles by which it will be conducted by the Council, the main priorities for improvement and how these will be addressed.

2.2 The strategy sets out the following vision:

Barking and Dagenham Council recognises that we will help to build a better life for all by listening to local people to understand their priorities, and enabling people to get involved in achieving those priorities. We recognise that, in challenging financial times we have to find new ways of delivering public services. We will therefore empower local residents and businesses to get involved to the extent to which they wish to, and strive always to go beyond statutory requirements for consultation and involvement.

2.3 The strategy has three main aims:

- Deepening our relationship with the public
- Developing new ways of engaging and building trust with local people
- Working better together

2.4 The strategy is drafted as a strategy for the Council, with actions to be led by the Council. However, its principles apply just as much in partner organisations, and many of its aims can only be achieved by close working with partners in the borough. It is therefore proposed, if this strategy is agreed, to encourage partners working in the borough such as the police, College, voluntary organisations and NHS to adopt the same principles, and to work with the Council to achieve the same aims.

3. Options Appraisal

- 3.1 The Council is not required to produce an engagement and empowerment strategy. However, the principles and aims contained within this strategy are good practice, can be delivered within existing resources and will help the Council to make good quality decisions, based on sound customer insight.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 Consultation has taken place with the Engagement Officers' Group, which consists of representatives of bodies across the Local Strategic Partnership. The strategy was reviewed by the Safer and Stronger Select Committee on 25 October, where some clarifications were sought, and broad support was expressed.

5. Financial Implications

Implications verified by: Jo Moore, Finance Group Manager

- 5.1 There are no specific financial implications associated with this proposal. The costs associated with the production of the document as well as the implications / requirements of it once adopted include staff time and general office expenditure (such as printing and software etc), all of which will be funded from within existing revenue budgets (and staff establishment).

6. Legal Implications

Implications verified by: Eldred Taylor-Camara, Legal Group Manager

- 6.1 Numerous pieces of legislation require the Council as a local authority and public body to consult with the public before making or enforcing its decisions. In many such situations, the manner and level of consultation is prescribed by law. As a result, the application of the Strategy to which this report refers will need to be subject to any such legislative provisions or procedures to the contrary.

7. Other Implications

- 7.1 **Risk Management.** Effective customer engagement is a key means of mitigating risks, since work and services which have been subject to effective consultation and engagement are more likely to be designed to meet customer needs.

7.2 Customer Impact

This strategy is designed to support the spread of good practice in engagement and empowerment activities, rather than to introduce new policies, or deliver specific services or activities.

The principles of good engagement practice contained within this strategy include specific reference to timely liaison with the equalities fora which exist to support engagement with key equalities groups. Representatives of the equalities fora will be invited to join the Engagement Officers' Group to ensure even better co-ordination across engagement activities, and to ensure that the needs of equalities groups are met.

It is proposed that the Engagement Officers Group will keep under review the extent to which engagement activities follow best practice, and make recommendations for training and support where this is not followed.

- 7.3 **Safeguarding Children.** The Council already has a range of highly effective engagement mechanisms to engage with children and their families. This strategy will support the dissemination of that best practice into other service areas and enable the sharing of learning between engagement activities.
- 7.4 **Health Issues.** By joining up engagement activities between services across the Partnership, there is scope for all services to make better use of limited resources. Officers working Public Health will be asked to join the Engagement Officers Group to ensure that the benefits of effective engagement across the Partnership are shared in public health work.
- 7.5 **Crime and Disorder Issues.** By joining up engagement activities between services across the Partnership, there is scope for all services to make better use of limited resources. A representative of the local police will be asked to join the Engagement Officers Group to ensure that the benefits of effective engagement across the Partnership are shared in crime and disorder work.

Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

None

List of appendices:

Appendix 1: 'Listening to the 'Word on the Street': a plan for community involvement 2011 - 2014