

Community Engagement Briefing Paper

Introduction

This paper will provide a brief introduction to the new Community Engagement Framework for Brighton and Hove, which was adopted by all members of the 2020 Community Partnership in December 2008. It had previously been adopted by Cabinet at their meeting in November 2008. Full copies of the Framework and an associated report on the consultation process that led to the development of the Framework will be available at the scrutiny panel meeting.

What is the Community Engagement Framework?

The Framework is both a policy document and a practical resource. As a policy document it sets out the 2020 Community Partnership's commitment to and understanding of community engagement in Brighton and Hove. As a practical resource it provides a clear definition of community engagement and importantly sets specific standards for community engagement that all partners must adhere to. Finally, it identifies the first wave of priority actions that must be taken to improve community engagement in the city.

Why a Framework?

There were a number of drivers for the Framework. At a national policy level, the new 'Duty to Involve' came into force in April 2009 (as a result of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) which places a legal duty on public sector bodies to involve citizens. Local Authorities will now also be subject to a new Comprehensive Area Assessment, which includes audit and assessment of not only the structures to support community engagement, but also citizen perception of that engagement.

But just as important has been a desire at a local level to improve activity. There has long been recognition that while there is some excellent practice on the ground, there is also some poor and patchy practice.

A short piece of research conducted in 2007 showed that there was a need to improve practice across the board and to get better at learning from both good and bad practice. There is a great deal of confusion about the language of engagement and a need to be much clearer about what form of engagement is required and how it will be supported. Finally, the research identified the need to improve co-ordination of activity and to prevent duplication, which can cause 'fatigue' and frustration, particularly for community groups on the ground.

The Framework Actions

There are a number of actions identified in the Framework, which fit under the overarching aims. These include actions such as the development of a cross sector training and development programme for staff and communities; the development of a web page where people can find out about consultations past and present; and an annual 'Get Involved' campaign where people can find out about the council and other public bodies as well as other opportunities to get involved in the community.

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