

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Agenda Item 19

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Community Engagement Framework Progress Report		
Date of Meeting:	20 July 2010		
Report of:	Director of Strategy and Governance		
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Wards Affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE/ EXEMPTIONS

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The Community Engagement Framework underpins efforts to improve public sector relationships with the communities they serve by establishing a common understanding of and commitment to community engagement across members of the Brighton and Hove Strategic Partnership (BHSP).
- 1.2 The Framework sets clear standards that BHSP members are signed up to and identifies priority actions to support delivery of its aims. It provides the policy framework to support delivery of the Duty to Involve and engagement in Intelligent Commissioning, and forms the basis of the Local Area Agreement Delivery Plan for NI 4, the % of people who feel able to influence decisions.
- 1.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission (OSC) agreed in October 2008 to play a role in monitoring public sector adherence to the Community Engagement Framework.
- 1.4 This report provides an update on progress of the implementation of the Community Engagement Framework and associated actions and makes recommendations to support the practical role of OSC in monitoring. The report relates specifically to activity designed to improve the coordination and quality of engagement practice. It flags up some of the learning resulting from this implementation, as well as highlighting some emerging positive activity.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) OSC considers the learning and risks identified during the first phase of implementation of the Framework and associated actions.

- (2) OSC supports the proposal for it to take a proactive role in receiving progress reports and addressing poor practice (paragraphs 7.4 and 7.5)

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Framework was developed in response to research which highlighted the need for a better understanding of different types of engagement, better coordination of activity on the ground, and skills development to improve the quality of engagement practice.
- 3.2 It recognises that improving this area of work will impact our ability to intelligently inform service improvements, achieve value for money and improve relationships and reputation with communities and partners.
- 3.3 The Framework was adopted by all members of the Brighton and Hove Strategic Partnership (BHSP) in November 2008. BHSP has delegated responsibility for overseeing the Community Engagement Framework to the Stronger Communities Partnership (SCP), which has responsibility to lead, develop and support active community engagement in strategic planning and decision making processes in the city.
- 3.4 A BHCC Local Engagement Officers Working Group has been established to oversee the Strengthening Communities Review of engagement activity in the city, which was an action in the Community Engagement Framework. The Review will lead efforts to improve engagement practice within BHCC in line with the Framework and to support moves towards Intelligent Commissioning. It will link with the Stronger Communities Partnership to ensure activity is complementary.
- 3.5 There are 29 actions set out in the Framework. The SCP has recently undertaken a review of its work plan and has prioritised activity for the current year. *A summary of the priorities is available in appendix 1. A short update on progress of actions not referenced in this report is available in appendix 2.*

4. FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 A post was created to support the council and its partners in efforts to embed the Framework and deliver the associated actions. This Community Engagement Improvement Officer post is for two years and will finish in March 2011. The role is focussed on providing advice and guidance to officers and staff from all sectors tasked with planning

engagement activity; supporting the SCP to oversee implementation; and supporting delivery of actions.

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF FRAMEWORK ACTIONS

5.1 Learning and Development

5.2 Improving the quality of engagement practice was a major theme identified during consultation on the Community Engagement Framework. A key action therefore, is the development of cross sector training opportunities.

5.3 An e-learning programme has been launched for BHCC staff. The programme provides a simple introduction to community engagement.

5.4 Confidential 'Face Your Fear' workshop sessions were held for council staff tasked with planning consultation or engagement initiatives, jointly run by the Communities Team and the Analysis and Research Team.

5.5 A community engagement training programme has been commissioned and is currently being piloted for staff within BHCC.

5.6 A networking event was held for managers from public and third sector organisations with strategic responsibility for community engagement. The aim was to bring staff together to share information and identify opportunities for joining up.

5.7 Outcomes from learning activities

5.8 There is a great deal that is very positive about the outcomes of the learning activity, which have so far been very well attended, suggesting that this is an area of work which people want to improve.

5.9 The e-learning programme has received positive feedback and is currently being discussed for inclusion within inductions of all new staff. Efforts are also underway to open access for partner organisations to the BHCC e-learning management system.

5.10 The Face Your Fear sessions presented an opportunity for staff to raise confidentially specific issues or concerns about activity they were involved in. Some are outlined here to highlight the need for ongoing support to implement the Framework and its associated actions. Examples included:

- Information collected, such as customer satisfaction information or equalities monitoring information which is not shared or analysed.
- Consultation processes implemented before sufficient work has been undertaken to clarify the scope, purpose and aims of the initiative.
- Staff with no training in research or community work asked to gather feedback (in one case from a vulnerable client group) on the quality of a service for contract monitoring purposes.
- Multiple consultations planned with a specific community or client group on related topics, without apparent exploration of the potential to join activities up.
- Consultation activity planned without background research to establish what is already known and what organisations, networks or structures already exist that might greatly enhance the quality of outcomes.

5.11 Risks

5.12 While it is possible that these examples are exceptions to the rule, they do highlight the following risks:

- Information is gathered, but not analysed, shared or understood, representing an inefficient use of time for officers, and of people who give that information, and also not making use of potentially good intelligence
- Inappropriate approaches used to gather feedback, compromising the quality of that feedback
- Poor quality information gathered which compromises reviews, contract monitoring and commissioning processes
- Ethical concerns around inappropriate or insensitive engagement of vulnerable people
- Lack of training or support leaving workers feeling unsupported or out of their depth in potentially sensitive situations
- Focus on information gathering rather than dialogue, leaving service users feeling frustrated that their views are not being heard or understood
- Services are not improved in ways that might prove beneficial
- Service users and communities question the ability of the organisation to coordinate activity and learn from existing intelligence, impacting on the reputation of the organisation

5.13 The Community Engagement Training course has only recently been commissioned and one course run. It is therefore too early to draw conclusions or provide comprehensive feedback. However evaluation from the first session was extremely positive. All three pilot courses are full, suggesting that there is an appetite for training in this area.

5.15 The Network event was attended by 52 representatives from public and third sector organisations. Participants stressed the need to continue to encourage skills development within organisations and also to improve collaboration and coordination of activity.

5.16 The Consultation Portal

5.17 In February 2009 TMT approved a paper which agreed to a revised system for research and consultation guidance; to communicate this process to staff in their Directorates; and to implement a city wide electronic consultation portal.

5.18 The Portal has been implemented to assist drives to improve the coordination of consultation activity in the city, and to support better practice through the quality control of consultation processes.

5.19 The Portal itself provides a virtual facility to store consultation proposals, and consultation reports which are searchable by date, theme, topic and organisation by all in the city. A wide variety of surveys and document consultations can be designed and completed on line and analysis supported via the system.

5.20 A basic training programme introducing the portal, its features and how to use some of the more immediate features (posting details of a consultation event, compiling basic surveys) is being run approximately every two weeks by the Analysis & performance team in the council and is open to all member organisations of the LSP and its subsidiaries

5.21 The revised system for research and consultation guidance has been supported by a Research Guidance Panel which meets to review BHCC consultation proposals, providing quality control.

5.22 The panel specifically addressed the issues raised in 5.11 and 5.12 offering a broad range of practical and professional advice and assistance to BHCC staff and external researchers

5.23 Issues arising

5.24 There is a great deal of interest and commitment across the city to support use of the Portal. However, there are also inherent issues around ensuring that staff within BHCC are encouraged and supported to use the system, particularly while the system is relatively new and unknown

5.25 Ensuring teams are aware of the Portal and that they then know how to use it requires intensive work and resources. Inevitably, it will also take time.

- 5.26 There is a sense, however, that the Research Guidance Panel has not been able to fulfil the role that was intended. The advice of the Panel has not always been taken up – for a variety of reasons, including lack of time or resources – but equally Panel members are volunteers to the process and have struggled to stay on top of the number of proposals they have been asked to comment on.
- 5.27 The outcome of this is that consultation activity is still undertaken, with and without the knowledge of the Panel that does not meet standards of practice set out in the Community Engagement Framework.
- 5.28 Historically, issues about poor practice in engagement are brought to the SCP via community representatives on that Partnership. The Partnership has attempted to address issues either through dialogue at Partnership meetings or by following up with appropriate officers or representatives, but this is dependent on a willingness of teams or organisations to respond.
- 5.29 Discussions are underway to refocus the Research Guidance Panel to concentrate on promoting the Consultation Portal and to share detail of consultations across the Partnership. There is also a potential role to encourage cross-sector participation on local engagement activity, supporting good practice. A meeting is planned with cross sector representatives from the SCP.

5.30 The Get Involved Campaign

- 5.31 The Get Involved Campaign was launched in November 2009 with aims to raise awareness of and celebrate the huge range of opportunities that exist in the city for people to get involved: in their community; in local decision making; in democratic processes; by voting and by taking part in consultation activities.
- 5.32 The campaign launch was organised by a cross sector steering group led by Democratic Services within BHCC and is accompanied by a Get Involved website (www.getinvolvedinthecity.org.uk) designed to bring together into one online space information about the range of opportunities to 'get involved'.
- 5.33 While there was much to learn from the launch event, including the need to focus more on engaging with communities 'where they are at', there was a great deal that was very positive. The campaign has provided a practical vehicle through which organisations can start to work more collaboratively, and many have noted the positive impact of greater partnership working.
- 5.34 The group supporting the Get Involved campaign is working closely with representatives from the Take Part Advisory group to plan future activities. Take Part is a £180,000 programme of activity to support

citizen involvement in local decision making and governance. The programme is currently in its second and final year.

6. INTEREST FROM OTHER AREAS

6.1 There is evidence that other areas are looking to Brighton and Hove as leaders in the field of engagement and empowerment and there has been a great deal of interest in the Community Engagement Framework and associated activity, particularly the Get Involved campaign and website:

- A case study was produced by IDeA on the Community Engagement Framework to support their publication 'the Ideal Empowering Authority: an illustrated Framework'.
- Presentation and discussion with representatives from Cumbria County Council and Copeland District Council on the Community Engagement Framework and Get Involved website
- Presentation and discussion with a network of community engagement officers from Hastings on the Community Engagement Framework
- Interest from the London Regional Empowerment Network in producing a case study on the Get Involved campaign – a draft has been produced.
- Numerous approaches for examples of good practice in engagement and empowerment activity from other authorities and networks.
- Invitation to speak to a network of Engagement Officers from East Sussex on the Community Engagement Framework
- A presentation to the South East Regional Empowerment Partnership by a local activist on her experience of being involved in Brighton and Hove
- Local invitations to speak to groups and networks on the Framework and / or Get Involved related activities, such as democratic engagement or how the council works.

7. Conclusions and Next Steps

7.1 A great deal of ground has been covered since the adoption of the Community Engagement Framework and feedback has been extremely positive.

7.2 There has been a positive willingness from teams across the authority and partners to work towards improving practice and coordination, and an encouraging take up of the support and advice being offered.

7.3 This focus on providing support, advice and guidance and a willingness to develop learning opportunities in response to the issues being raised is one we are keen to continue.

- 7.4 However, there is a need to address poor practice where it is persistent and has an adverse affect on the reputation of the council or wider public sector. We are therefore also keen to employ constructively the Scrutiny Function role to monitor adherence to the Community Engagement Framework (as set out in the section of the Framework on implementation and monitoring).
- 7.5 The central recommendation is that OSC receives annual updates on progress on the implementation of the Framework, which can highlight areas of concern, or flag up specific poor practice.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Extensive consultation was undertaken to support development of the Community Engagement Framework during 2008. The Brighton and Hove Strategic Partnership drove the development of the Framework and delegated responsibility for the day to day process to a cross sector steering group comprised of representatives from each organisation on the LSP plus representatives from each of the BHCC Directorates.
- 8.2 A copy of the consultation report can be accessed via <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=c1218794>

9. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 9.1 The Public Service Board has allocated a block of LPSA2 reward grant funding relating to Stronger Communities of £170k in 2009/10 and £370k in 2010/11. Within this amount is a £20k allocation for both years in respect of the Community Engagement Framework.

New commitments against 2010/11 allocations are currently under review. For 2011/12 it is assumed that there will be no further funding for the project or the Community Engagement Improvement Officer post.

There is additionally a recurring fixed budget of £90k within the in respect of the SCP secretariat, which funds a programme of activities to support community and voluntary sector involvement, representation and influence in citywide strategic planning and decision making.

Legal Implications:

- 9.2 The recommendations in section 2 of this report fall within the powers of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission.

Equalities Implications:

- 9.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken on the Community Engagement Framework. A basic principle of the CEF is to reduce or remove barriers to engagement and to increase opportunities to enable engagement. The CEF aims to reduce / minimise the negative impacts or results of community engagement activity, by seeking to improve co-ordination of activity; develop the skills, knowledge and experience of engagement workers; and implement actions to encourage 'deeper and wider' engagement within the city.

Sustainability Implications:

- 9.4 The Community Engagement Framework aims and standards encourage good practice to support the building of sustainable communities. Good community engagement contributes to effective, sustainable use of land and resources and supports principles of social justice and equity. Individual projects supported through engagement processes will frequently have a direct impact on the environment and will encourage access to services and support.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 9.5 Not applicable

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 9.6 The central risk to The Community Engagement Framework is that the aims and standards are not embedded within organisation practice before resources to support its implementation end in March 2011.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 9.7 The Community Engagement supports many aspects of corporate and citywide strategies including the Sustainable Community Strategy, council's corporate plan and more recent developments around 'A council the city deserves'. Stronger community engagement helps build trust and relationships with communities, involves more people in decision making, improves quality of life and will help build the reputation of the council and wider public sector.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Summary of Stronger Communities Partnership priorities for the Community Engagement Framework
2. Update on progress of Community Engagement Framework actions

Documents In Members' Rooms

- 1.
- 2.

Background Documents

1. Community Engagement Framework
- 2.