

Report to	Special Democratic Services Committee
Date of meeting	Monday 27 th November 2023
Lead Member / Officer	Catrin Roberts (Head of Service for Corporate Support Services: People), Cllr Julie Matthews (Lead Member for Corporate Strategy, Policy and Equalities)
Report author	Jo Sutton (Public Engagement Officer)
Title	Approval of draft Community Engagement Policy and draft Public Participation Strategy for public consultation prior to ratification

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1. This report is about the progress of the Council's Community Engagement Policy, and the Council's Public Participation Strategy

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1. The Council previously sought early views of the Special Democratic Services Committee in June 2023 on the draft document before preparing the final version for consultation.
- 2.2. We are now seeking approval from the committee to take these documents out to public consultation before they are ratified and implemented across the Council

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1. That the Committee approved both documents to be translated and disseminated to the public for a 'final steer' before seeking to ratify them and approve their implementation at a later date

4. Report details

- 4.1. The Council does not currently have a formal approach to engagement, consultation or public participation in any other council decision-making process
- 4.2. In 2017 the Council appointed a Public Engagement Officer with the aim of researching and developing a formalised/standardised approach to assist Officers and to ensure consistency, transparency and fairness in council decision-making processes
- 4.3. Between 2019-2021, work to develop a Community Engagement Policy took place, including a three-year independent research project to understand and to benchmark residents' views on their understanding of opportunities for involvement and identifying areas where the Council could be doing better.
- 4.4. The Policy was almost ready for approval in 2021, however the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021 came into effect, requiring the Council to develop a Public Participation Strategy. The requirements of the Strategy had been partially met by pre-existing work developing the Engagement Policy, however not all requirements were met. The Community Engagement Policy was put on hold so that work to carry out legislative requirements of the Act could be researched and met.
- 4.5. The Strategy requires the Council to ensure that provisions are in place, but provides no guidance on the approach that officers should take, therefore the two documents went through 'final development' in tandem: with the Policy aiming to guide officers' thinking when considering approaches to engagement and consultation activities, and the Participation Strategy highlighting existing provision and identifying areas for improvement, to be kept under review.
- 4.6. It is important to note that a number of processes for which the local authority is responsible (planning, permanent changes to the local authority highway network, granting of some licenses and public space protection orders to name

but a few) etc have their own legislative requirements or guidance for carrying out consultations and the Policy was therefore designed to encourage officers to think about what they *could* do, rather than being overly prescriptive. This should ensure consistency of approach without contravening any existing legislative consultation requirements.

4.7. Both documents are included as appendices to this report

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1. A better connected Denbighshire – Developing community engagement schemes to support community involvement and decision making in local regeneration.
- 5.2. A fairer safe and more equal Denbighshire – Ensuring that people from diverse backgrounds, seldom heard groups, and those from socio-economic disadvantage are heard and inform decision making.
- 5.3. A well-run, high performing council – Being a ‘learning’ organisation that uses feedback.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1. There is no direct cost associated with implementing either the Strategy or the Policy
- 6.2. There is a cost implication for continuing to run the Council’s online engagement platform *the County Conversation Portal*. This is currently being funded by money from the 2017-2022 Corporate Plan cycle however when the current licence expires a new funding route will need to be sought. The platform is well-used (with a recent consultation on Libraries receiving over 4,600 responses) and at a current cost of approximately £8,000.00 per year, represents good value for money.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

- 7.1. Overall the Community Engagement Policy and Public Participation Strategy will have a mixture of positive or neutral impacts. Neutral impacts on areas of

the assessment pertaining to capital works, infrastructure etc. Positive impacts on areas of the assessment pertaining to community resilience, community cohesion etc.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

- 8.1. An independent research project was carried out over three years between 2019 and 2021 to support the development of the Community Engagement Policy. This included street surveys, an online survey, virtual workshops and interviews with members of SLT and key Lead Elected Members at the time
- 8.2. A further independent research project was carried out in 2023 to address some of the gaps in the Community Engagement Policy that were legislative requirements of the Public Participation Strategy. This also included street surveys, an online survey and additionally in June 2023 Officers attended the Special Democratic Services Committee to present the draft documents and seek their early input before developing the final drafts (now attached as appendices to this document)

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

- 9.1. Not required

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

- 10.1. Not implementing at least the Public Participation Strategy presents a risk of the authority being in breach of the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021. This can be mitigated by approving the document for public consultation and subsequent ratification.
- 10.2. Not implementing the Community Engagement Policy will mean that it may be difficult for the Council to take a consistent approach when creating and managing engagement activities, and additional internal resources and signposting will also be difficult to provide without the Policy to back them up. This can be mitigated by approving the document for public consultation and subsequent ratification.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1. Power to approve the documents for public consultation rests with the Special Democratic Services Committee

12. Appendices

12.1. Public Participation Strategy



Participation Strategy
- Draft Strategy.docx

12.2. Public Participation Strategy Well-being Impact Assessment



WBIA Public
Participation Strategy

12.3. Community Engagement Policy



Community
Engagement Policy_N