STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 14 MARCH 2024

Report Title	Community Engagement Principles
Purpose of Report	This report is to present Stroud District Council's Community Engagement Principles to the Committee. It contains details of the consultation process to date and the themes identified from feedback and proposes an approach for implementation.
Decision(s)	**The Committee RESOLVES to:** a) **Adopt the Community Engagement Principles as part of the council's engagement practices, to link with the other engagement-type strategies, policies and practices used by the council.** b) **Agree the approach to implementation outlined in this report.** c) **Review the Community Engagement Principles after 12-18 months, to consider insights and learning gained from the implementation process.**
Consultation and Feedback	Consultation has taken place with: • LMT and the Community Connections Workstream (through an online survey followed by some meetings in person with more involved service areas) • ALT and SLT • The Leader, and the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Committees (where possible) • The Youth Council • EDIE Working Group • Council services with a particular focus on engagement e.g. Community Development, Tenant Services, Corporate Policy & Governance, Customer Access and Communications. • 3M Artists A selection of community voices and VCSE organisations have also been asked for their feedback (if they feel able to provide some). Feedback has been gathered from 35 consultees or service areas so far and is summarised by main themes in Section 2 below.
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Options	Option 1: Do nothing – have no community engagement principles to guide the council's interactions with communities. Option 2: Produce an in-depth community engagement strategy over the three-year time period originally indicated by the Council Plan. This was not regarded as a suitable option because of the length of time to develop a full strategy, and the feasibility of producing this within the Fit for the Future programme resource. In addition, research into the types of community engagement strategies that have been implemented by other organisations indicates that they do not always appear to lend themselves to easy application by practitioners. Option 3: Produce a set of community engagement principles which are feasible to apply, embed, communicate and monitor. Option 3 is the recommended option and the report is set out on this basis.
Background Papers	None
Appendices	Appendix A – Draft Community Engagement Principles Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment

Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	No	Yes	No

1. Introduction

1.1 There is a commitment in the Council Plan (CW3.1) and the Fit for the Future modernisation programme to develop a strategic approach to guide how we engage with communities – for example, informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering.

1.2 In Spring 2023 it was agreed by the Alliance Leadership Team and the Senior Leadership Team that an overarching set of Principles would be more pragmatic than an intensive strategy that might take some years to develop and which might be more difficult to apply consistently across the Council.

1.3 The draft Community Engagement Principles (Appendix A) have been developed through the Community Connections Workstream of the Fit for Future modernisation programme, based on research of good practice.

1.4 These Principles are important to guide the council's engagement work and opportunities across all service areas, so that there is a consistent approach, and the impact of effective community engagement can be evaluated and celebrated.

1.5 Applying the Principles as 'One Council' will help us live an Asset Based approach to Community Development and help make it a more positive experience for communities to engage with us and will help the council reflect on what it has learned.

1.6 The 10 Principles are reproduced below for ease of reference:

1. **Involvement:** we will work with community stakeholders to identify and involve the people and organisations who have an interest in the focus of the engagement, ensuring accessibility, inclusivity, diversity and equality.

2. **Support:** we will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement.

3. **Planning:** we will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this evidence to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken.

4. **Methods:** we will implement and use methods of engagement that are effective.

5. **Working Together:** We will implement and use clear procedures that enable people to work with one another effectively and efficiently.

6. **Sharing Information:** we will ensure that necessary information is communicated with the participants of community engagement, in line with Data Protection legislation.

7. **Working with Others:** we will collaborate with energy, respect and effectiveness with others with an interest in the engagement like stakeholders, statutory partners and third parties.

8. **Improvement:** we will develop actively the skills, knowledge and confidence of our people so that they can engage with communities more effectively.

9. **Feedback:** we will feed back the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected.

10. **Monitoring and Evaluation**: we will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purposes, and we will use our learning to improve our engagement.

2.   Consultation approach

2.1   A Survey Monkey consultation was launched to gather the views of LMT and Community Connections Workstream members between 18th December 2023 and 19th January 2024 (with time extension given to a number of colleagues).

2.2   This was supported by 1-2-1 meetings with the Leader, Chairs and Vice Chairs of Committees (subject to their availability) up until 5th March 2024.

2.3   The Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Equity (EDIE) Working Group considered the Principles at its January 2024 meeting, as did the Youth Council in February 2024. Both groups have provided feedback.

2.4   A Member Information Evening has been scheduled for 5th March with a focus on the Community Engagement Principles, and also the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Principles.

2.5   This consultation period culminates in the Alliance Leadership Team meeting of 6th March.

2.6   A sample of community voices and VCSE groups have been asked for feedback on the Principles via email and deeper conversations will take place if the Principles are approved, in which will feed in to the first evaluation and review process. This will include the CN2030 Community Engagement Board.

3.   Themes and opportunities identified during the consultation process

3.1   There was general agreement that the Community Engagement Principles **are needed, appropriate and concise** with some suggestions on how they might be improved such as amended wording or added clarification (e.g. explaining that Principle 8 relates to SDC looking to improve on previous engagement). Another suggestion was to reduce the number of Principles.

3.2   In summary, respondents liked the clarity; simplicity; good emphasis on feedback, monitoring and evaluation; encouragement of inclusivity, accountability and proper planning.

3.3   **Alignment:** consultees referenced the need to align the community engagement principles as an overarching framework linked to each of the engagement-type strategies and policies used by the council. e.g. engaging with young people or tenants; working with Town and Parish Councils or facilitating consultations.

3.4   **Application:** a key theme was 'how will the Principles be applied and used?' which suggests the need for a robust implementation plan.

3.4.1   The guidelines could be too prescriptive or too flexible without appropriate implementation and governance.

3.4.2   They may be useful to apply to regulatory services who do not regularly undertake proactive engagement, as long as thought is given to the fit with legislative requirements.

3.4.3   We need to identify engagement opportunities and work together as one council to have a truly effective community engagement framework.

3.4.4   Governance arrangements needed so we know the Principles are applied consistently and can evaluate their impact.

3.4.5   Majority felt that the practical tips and advice should be provided in a separate toolkit (perhaps on a mini site), and case studies and good practice could be added to this as the Principles are embedded and used.

3.5   **Guidance on hard to identify and seldom heard groups** was requested by some consultees. This can be developed through the implementation phase – for example, conversations with the VCSE, sharing good practice and case studies, and reviewing the effectiveness of different methods.

3.6   **Empowering and decision making:** the Principles could be strengthened to reference feeding back to communities after formal decisions have been made and involving communities in the whole decision-making process from start to end.

3.7   **Further consultation is needed with the VCSE and directly with communities**, to listen to their opinions on the Principles and collaborate on testing them.

3.8   **Time, resource and skills -** the council should make sufficient time available and prioritised to do community engagement well. However, some consultees were concerned about the resource capacity in their service and felt the Principles might raise expectations that would be hard to meet without additional resource. Upskilling and training our staff

was another consideration, as was the potential financial implications of placing decisions in the hands of communities.

3.9 **Data protection** legislation will need to be followed depending on the information shared with people participating in the type of engagement.

3.10 **Communication:** how to launch, brand and communicate the Principles to communities as well as staff and partners. E.g. shop window or statement of commitment felt to be better approach than a list of principles. It could be hard to remember 10 principles but they could be turned into an infographic or image. Communicating information from engagement and consultation exercise to each other within SDC as well as communities will be important.

4. Proposal to address feedback:

4.1 Feedback received during consultation has helped to shape the Principles and will inform their implementation and review. This is outlined below.

4.2 **Alignment:** Map alignment of the Principles with other strategies and policies and ensure there is a process to increase alignment and governance. The proposal is to organise a District Council officer Leadership Management Team (LMT) workshop to identify the engagement opportunities across council services along with the methods and strategies currently deployed, identify good practice, and complete a register/map of how these could be aligned.

4.3 As strategies and polices are reviewed, there would be an expectation for them to reference the community engagement principles and to include accountability for them in their governance arrangements.

4.4 Present the Community Engagement Principles and the VCSE Principles at the District Council Elected Member Information Evening on 5th March, Alliance Leadership Team on 6th March in preparation for the Committee meeting on 14th March.

4.5 **Implementation:** Co-create an implementation plan with Members, LMT and service representatives, to address specific points raised through the consultation process and to incorporate any further suggestions. The EDIE Working Group would be a valuable critical friend to this process. An implementation plan will help us navigate the journey to fully embed the principles into our culture and DNA.

4.6 Considerations for implementation plan (from consultation feedback)

    a. Application
    b. Governance
    c. Skills and training
    d. Community involvement and feedback
    e. Relationship with other engagement strategies and policies
    f. Identifying and sharing good practice
    g. Performance management
    h. Resource and financial implications
    i. Communications
    j. Procedure for review and updating.

5. Alignment with VCSE Principles

5.1 The VCSE Principles are being considered in parallel to SDC's Community Engagement Principles. These two pieces of work are complementary but have key differences.

5.2 The VCSE Framework seeks to provide the council and its partners in the VCSE with a set of commonly understood good practice guidelines for communication and support. It is designed to strengthen working relationship with a transparent and consistent approach.

5.3 The Community Engagement Principles are a toolkit for the council's officers and members across all their work with communities and individuals. The support an asset-based community development (ABCD) approach underpinned by consistency, respect and reliability, applicable in the many and varied interactions which the council has with its communities of place and interest.

6. Alignment with Cultural Strategy

6.1 The Cultural Strategy is about embedding a cultural of creativity across the district and council and the Community Engagement Principles are about embedding a culture of effective engagement.

6.2 Both the Cultural Strategy and the Principles require an exercise of 'what opportunities are out there' and 'which ones should be prioritised for investment?' They also both build on the strengths and assets already present in communities.

6.3 Culture and arts can be a good 'way in' to effective community engagement.

7. Conclusion

7.1 In conclusion, an intensive consultation first phase has been completed and the draft Community Engagement Principles in Appendix A have been updated to address key points. If the Principles are approved by Committee, deeper conversations with community leaders and VCSE organisations will take place as the Principles are implemented and embedded.

7.2 The Principles align with the council's values and behaviours, and specifically with Making a Difference – placing the people in our communities at the heart of everything we do.

7.3 The main themes from the consultation so far have been considered and will be addressed through an implementation plan if the Principles are approved.

7.4 The Principles should be used to guide the approach to collaborating on an implementation plan, including working with LMT and service representatives as well as continuing to research good practice.

7.5 Effective application of the Community Engagement Principles will help the council and communities with thorny questions such as 'how do we find and collaborate with volunteers on the canal project?', 'how can we work more effectively with communities to prevent ASB?', 'how can we increase community participation in planning and licensing consultations?' 'how can we work together to achieve more through the community hub model? 'how can we collaborate with communities to tackle health inequalities like air pollution?'

7.6 It is suggested that the Principles are evaluated and reviewed in 12-18 months' time following a period of implementation and learning.

8.   Implications

8.1 **Financial Implications**

There are no direct financial implications within this report.

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8.2 **Legal Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.
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8.3 **Equality Implications**

An EIA has been carried out by Officers in relation to the decision made in this report and no adverse equality implications arise.

8.4 **Environmental Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.