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## **DRAFT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

**Report by Director Resilient Communities**

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**SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL**

**25 April 2024**

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### **1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The report is seeking approval of a draft Community Engagement Strategy and a new approach to its continual development.**
- 1.2 The draft strategy can be viewed [here](#)
- 1.3 The draft illustrates a new approach to setting strategic principles utilising a “living” document that lives within Scottish Borders Councils digital platform to allow it to be easily reviewed and responsive to feedback and actions to better support communities through iterative improvements in the way we engage.
- 1.4 The report summarises the engagement that informed the creation of the document, and the other workstreams within the Council and partners that inform the future work plan.
- 1.5 The report outlines proposed actions to support the delivery of the principles of the strategy and alignment with other pieces of work that are ongoing and planned.

### **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 I recommend that the Committee:**
  - (a) Agrees to the publication of the draft strategy as a document page within the Scottish Borders Council website;**
  - (b) Agrees to the proposed methods of engagement within the document for organic feedback to be appraised at the next review point;**
  - (c) Agrees the suggested action points outlined to support the objectives and implementation of the principles within the strategy; and**

**Receives a further update report after the feedback from the consultation has been reviewed in August 2024.**

### **3 BACKGROUND**

3.1 The work to refresh the Community Engagement strategy commenced in 2022 when the Community Engagement team commissioned a project with CGI to conduct workshops with communities, staff and partners on the way that they engaged with the Council. The work sought to understand the experiences of respondents, perceived barriers, and commentary on the overall engagement experience.

A summary of the feedback can be found within the [strategy](#) under heading "Evaluating Engagement".

3.2 The full report sought to utilise the feedback to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current state. The qualitative information gathered in the engagement was coupled with benchmarking against other local authorities across Scotland, and considered the National context for best practice and the build trust between Council and community.

3.3 The report identified a number of actions that CGI recommended in regard to our approach and vision, methods of engagements, key partnerships, and actions. Suggestions for tools and tool kits to realise the recommendations were also included.

3.4 One of the defining recommendations of the report was the proposal of a continuous improvement loop, which is the foundation of this new approach, and intended as a demonstration of our commitment to communities to engage and be responsive to that engagement.

### **4 APPROACH**

4.1 The content of the strategy has been borne from the recommendations of the commissioned report, and designed to reflect the real time feedback officers have received over the intervening period through other engagement methods, including:

- Community Conversations
- Place Making
- Related consultations, such as the Council Plan and Budget Engagement

4.2 The engagement work provided the foundation for recommendations on core principles for a new strategy, changes to the current approach, impact of presentation of content and suggestions for tool kits

4.3 The strategy for change is set out as:

- Setting out the approach we will take to support active, inclusive engagement with our communities.
- Looking at accessibility and identified barriers and how those could be overcome.
- Establishing a whole council approach and stand-up training to support culture change.
- Creating an action plan to understand the gaps in tools and systems to engage in the ways we want to.

- Create a living strategy which is dynamic and responsive to feedback which can be hosted as a web page with interactive content which is easily update with transparent information on how the strategy is developing and we are performing against it.

## **5 ACTIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1 Agreement of the strategy document will allow for the agreed content to be worked up as a document page for publication on the Council website. This is a working draft which invites comment and feedback from communities with an active survey embedded into the strategy itself. This will be accompanied by a campaign on social media and the website to raise awareness of the publication and invite interaction.

A traditional print copy in accessible formats will also be made available to ensure access for those who do not wish to interact digitally.

- 5.2 A review date is set for end of August 2024 to review all of the feedback from the public to this first draft and align with the anticipated publication of the Youth Participation and Engagement Strategy. This is work currently underway as part of the Children and Young People’s Planning Partnership Group anticipated to complete in summer 2024.

This would be the first update of an annual review programme which would allow for content to be updated against outcomes and developments in the strategy delivery.

- 5.3 In the interim period between publication and review alignment of outputs required to support the implementation of the strategy with existing work streams will continue.

These include:

- Review of Communication resources and tools
- Engagement culture
- Review of Community Team tool kit (Community Engagement team and those within other departments with specific engagement remits, such as Place Making team)
- Engagement data sharing
- Access to meeting space

An initial assessment of the overlap of this work with other workstreams is indicated in the table below:



## SBC Project Workstreams

Engagement Strategy Actions	Project	Strategy Specific	Customer Service Training Programme	Content Strategy	Website Phase 2	Jadu CRM System Development	Live Borders / SBC Booking System	ArcGIS Functionality Expansion	AI Strategy	IoT Strategy	Data Strategy	Device Refresh	Borderlands Digital Programme	Live Borders Assets Review	SBC Assets Mapping Programme
	Review of Comms resource and tools	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓		✓				
	Engagement Culture	✓	✓												
	Review of Community Team Tool Kit	✓			✓	✓						✓			
	Engagement Data Sharing	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				
	Access to Meeting Space	✓					✓			✓			✓	✓	✓

Alignment with development of Customer Strategy



5.4 Alignment with workstreams allows for a programme to be structured to stand up projects to deliver tools, tool kits and training that support the delivery of the strategy.

5.5 Accessibility is a cross cutting theme of all the actions and work being undertaken to look at accessibility improvements as part of the Elections and website development will support this process.

Engagement workshops are being planned with user groups in the community to ensure focussed engagement on the topic. This will inform a number of initiatives and reduce over consultation.

## 6 IMPLICATIONS

### 6.1 Financial

There are no costs attached to any of the recommendations contained in this report.

The actions outlined may attract costs as distinct pieces of work, associated with their respective projects which will be outlined under those workplans.

Opportunities for improving the efficiency of engagement, reducing duplication and using data more effectively may, over time, represent savings to Scottish Borders Council.

### 6.2 Risk and Mitigations

- a) Community Expectations – the development of the new strategy sets out a series of improvement points that we want to commit to as a Council and this requires careful consideration of the communication plan that supports this to ensure transparency on how that is being achieved and measured and the timescales to deliver against the objectives.

- b) Collaborative Approach – this strategy is the flagship document for community engagement and as such creates a commitment to communities of our intention to uphold this across the whole Council. This will require a degree of culture shift across departments and training and support will be needed to ensure this is achievable and mitigate for a detrimental affect on capacity and resource.
- c) Inclusion – the nature of the strategy is to present and inclusive approach to engagement, however there are risks of digital exclusion if alternative forms of documentation are not offered.
- d) Accessibility - Content accessibility is considered as part of the wider website considerations and best practice is being adopted.

### 6.3 **Integrated Impact Assessment**

A Stage 1 Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed and accompanies this report. It is anticipated that there will be no negative impacts under either the Equality Duty or the Fairer Scotland Duty.

### 6.4 **Sustainable Development Goals**

The development of an inclusive Community Engagement Strategy has the potential to support delivery of all the goals with each being a potential topic for engagement and community comment.

Specifically Goal 3 – “Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages” is applicable by encouraging communities and individuals to be active contributors to Council service delivery and initiatives which delivers and foster a sense of identity, belonging and ownership in the activities within their communities. This also addresses against Goal 17 – “Partnerships for the goals” by building capacity and supporting participation in other pertinent goals; Goal 11 - “Sustainable Cities and Communities” and Goal 8 - “Decent Work and Economic Growth”.

### 6.5 **Climate Change**

A Borders-wide and sustained engagement with communities, will contribute to net zero transition through active encouragement of an engaged population. This in turn should help to build trust between the Council and the communities we serves and provide better working relationships with community led organisations to support delivery on objectives that support the Just Transition to Net Zero.

That includes:

- Providing and enhancing local amenities and services
- Reuse and conservation of buildings and local assets
- Making use of existing or underused heritage assets
- Providing opportunities for food growing, recreation, education, skills development as well as health and wellbeing benefits.
- Connecting up engagement activity with climate focussed partners such as Scottish Borders Climate Action Network delivered by Southern Upland Partnership to support projects in climate action projects

### 6.6 **Rural Proofing**

Not applicable.

## 6.7 **Data Protection Impact Statement**

There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

## 6.8 **Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

Not applicable

## **7 CONSULTATION**

7.1 The Director (Finance & Corporate Governance), the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change), the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

### **Approved by**

**Name** Jenni Craig **Title** Director of Resilient Communities

### **Author(s)**

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**Background Papers:** N/A

**Previous Minute Reference:** N/A

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