
Meeting of the Cabinet – 23rd September 2020

Report of the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise

Statement of Community Involvement

Purpose

1. To seek approval for the adoption of the Statement of Community Involvement 2020 (SCI)

Recommendations

2. It is recommended:-
 - That Cabinet approves the adoption of the Statement of Community Involvement 2020 (SCI)
 - That following adoption, Cabinet authorises the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise to make any minor modifications necessary to the SCI, for instance to reflect further changes to government regulations and guidance.

Background

3. The Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how the Council will consult on planning policy documents, neighbourhood plans, planning and related applications and development orders, as well as who the Council will consult and for how long. A copy of the SCI is attached at Appendix 1.
4. The previous SCI was adopted by the Council at a meeting of Cabinet on the 8th February 2017. This followed a consultation exercise which was undertaken on that document during October and November 2016. The SCI, which is the subject of this report, is an updated and revised version of the 2017 SCI.
5. As directed by government, the primary reason for revising and updating the 2017 SCI was to enable the Council to effectively engage with stakeholders on its planning documents and planning processes during times of nationally or locally prescribed periods of social distancing, such as in the case of the current Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, during times of social distancing, this revised and updated SCI: -

- does not require planning policy documents to be made available within reception areas and at libraries;
 - highlights that public meetings, including Committee meetings and Public Local Inquiries, as well as exhibitions and displays, can be undertaken through virtual means, to enable people, regardless of their location, to use video, audio, and text to link up online;
 - states that site visits on planning applications by the case officer will not be a requirement, especially during a full lockdown phase, and instead site notices are posted, and applicants are requested to provide site photos, with any site visits undertaken carried out in line with the most up-to-date risk assessment which aligns with government advice.
6. As this version of the SCI is an update of the previously adopted version and it was drafted during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, no external consultation has been undertaken.
7. The SCI helps enable the Council to engage with the community, both residents and businesses, on planning issues in a way which reflects the aims and objectives of the Council Plan and the Values and Behaviours' Framework. This is with particular regard to: -
- Empowering people to become self-reliant, independent and well-co-ordinated and to grow strong, connected and resilient communities;
 - Delivering our services in a transparent and clear way, and providing feedback;
 - Engaging with, and getting views from, a wider cross section of the community;
 - Using new and a wide range of communication methods, for example, social media.
8. As an adopted document, the SCI provides established policy, protocol and guidance for the Council in the engagement with the community in the delivery of our planning service. It is currently proposed to update the SCI on a three-year cycle.

Finance

9. The preparation of the SCI has been funded from existing budgets and resources dedicated to the production of planning documents.
10. In terms of the implementation of the SCI's recommendations, it is recognised that while appropriate community engagement is likely to generally incur costs in terms of resources and officers' time, any such costs will be minimised through the appropriate use of technology, for, example, through social media networks, and contacting individuals and organisations via e-mail, rather than incurring the cost of mailing letters out.

Law

11. In terms of the processing of planning applications, the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 sets out the step local authorities need to take, with regard to the processing and administration of planning applications.
12. In terms of plan making, the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 set out the procedures to be followed in the preparation of local plan documents.
13. Government Guidance (Planning Practice Guidance), dated 13th May 2020 requires local planning authorities to assess their SCIs to identify which policies are inconsistent with guidance on staying at home and away from others.
14. On the 25th June 2020, through a Ministerial Statement, the Government introduced the Business and Planning Bill in Parliament. The Bill responds to the Covid-19 emergency and brings forward temporary changes to the planning system to support economic recovery. This statement sets out supporting temporary measures that the Government proposes to ensure the planning system continues to operate effectively, including in consulting with stakeholders.

Equality Impact

15. A major emphasis of this SCI is that the Council takes positive and appropriate actions in enabling more of the community the opportunity to be involved in planning, including engaging with more “hard to reach” groups. This includes encouraging young people, ethnic minority communities and disabled members of the community to engage more with the planning process, encouraging inclusivity, equal opportunities and community empowerment and resilience.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

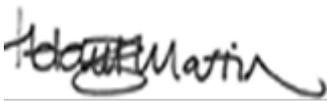
16. The proposals contained in this report have no implications for any additional human resources or Organisational Development requirements and provide the necessary flexibility for our existing resources to achieve effective delivery of the Council’s Services under changing external circumstances.

Commercial/Procurement

17. Any procurement required will comply with DMBC’s Contract Standing Orders (which are fully compliant with Public Sector and OJEU procurement rules and guidelines) and all funders requirements. There are no direct commercial implications associated with this report.

Health, Wellbeing and Safety

18. A major emphasis of the SCI is helping to enable communities to become stronger and more resilient, through measures such as engaging with harder to reach communities and the promotion of Neighbourhood Planning.
19. A spatial objective of the planning system is a social one - to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being. It is envisaged that the SCI will provide an effective and transparent means of helping to engage communities in the delivery of planning policies which capture this social objective.



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Appendices

Appendix 1 – The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) 2020