Meeting	**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY TASK AND FINISH GROUP**
Time/Day/Date	6.30 pm on Monday, 26 January 2015
Location	Board Room, Council Offices, Coalville
Officer to contact	Democratic Services (01530 454512)

All persons present are reminded that the meeting may be recorded and by attending this meeting you are giving your consent to being filmed and your image being used. You are kindly requested to make it known to the Chairman if you intend to film or record this meeting.

The Monitoring Officer would like to remind members that when they are considering whether the following items are exempt information under the relevant paragraph under part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 they must have regard to the public interest test. This means that members must consider, for each item, whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption from disclosure outweighs the public interest in making the item available to the public.

AGENDA

Item		Pages
1.	**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**	
2.	**DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**	
	Under the Code of Conduct members are reminded that in declaring disclosable interests you should make clear the nature of that interest and whether it is pecuniary or non-pecuniary.	
3.	**MINUTES**	
	To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2014	**3 - 8**
4.	**DRAFT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**	
	To finalise the Draft Community Engagement Strategy to be presented to Policy Development Group.	**9 - 18**

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MINUTES of a meeting of the COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY TASK AND FINISH GROUP held in the Room 140, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2014

Present: Councillors D Everitt, V Richichi, S Sheahan and M Specht

Officers: Mrs M Meredith and Ms K Talbot

11. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor S Sheahan suggested that, as the Task and Finish Group consisted of two Members from each party, the meeting be chaired in rotation.

It was therefore moved by Councillor S Sheahan, seconded by Councillor M Specht and

RESOLVED THAT:

Councillor D Everitt take the chair for the remainder of the meeting.

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

13. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no interests declared.

14. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2014.

Councillor S Sheahan referred to the group discussion and requested that his comment be amended to read "the best results were achieved when the Council and communities were working side by side".

RESOLVED THAT:

Subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2014 be approved as a correct record.

15. DRAFT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager referred to the copies of the strategy document which had been circulated showing the changes which had been made. She sought comments from Members on the amendments and on how success could be measured more effectively.

Councillor S Sheahan asked the Stronger and Safer Team Manager to highlight where she had made changes.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager highlighted the amendments as follows:

In section 3, reference to the Big Society had been removed, as the original strategy was written prior to the Localism Act, which superceded the concept of the Big Society. As this legislation had now been enacted, a paragraph had been added into the strategy to reflect this.

Councillor S Sheahan welcomed this amendment.

The section regarding the requirement for Social Landlords to consult tenants had been updated and this was a factual change.

The section entitled Local Ambition had been updated to include the Council's core values, as the original strategy predated the core values. As these were referenced in most of the Council's publications, the Stronger and Safer Team Manager felt that it was important that these be included in the strategy.

In section 4, the reference to Community Forums had been removed as they were no longer active.

Councillor S Sheahan sought clarification regarding the sentence which had been removed at 3.2, and asked if this had been removed as it was slightly negative and superfluous.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager advised that the sentence had been removed as it referred to obstacles rather than opportunities.

In section 3.3 the sentence relating to increasing satisfaction levels had been removed, as engagement and satisfaction levels didn't always go hand in hand.

Reference to the Vision magazine had been removed as this no longer existed.

The Better Business for All section had been reworded to reflect the move towards Business Focus. It was felt that this demonstrated that the Council engaged with a broader range of local businesses.

Councillor S Sheahan sought clarification on why paragraph 5.11 had been deleted. The Stronger and Safer Team Manager advised that this had been removed as it referred to software which would be introduced. She added that the software referred to had now been implemented.

Councillor S Sheahan felt that this should still be referenced in the strategy and it should state that the Council would use this software.

Councillor S Sheahan sought clarification on the proposals for the measuring success section.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager stated that going back to the Leisure department and asking them to clarify their survey results had helped with this. She wondered whether it would be more appropriate to report on the number and types of surveys, response rates and demographics. She added that outcomes should also be reported, for example, what the Council was doing differently as a result.

Councillor S Sheahan commented that this whole section had been removed so it would be useful to insert the proposed replacements so these could be compared.

Councillor S Sheahan felt that paragraph 3.3 should be retained. He agreed that any negative connotations should be avoided, but the reference to communities not feeling excluded should be retained. He felt that this section could just say we also need to take appropriate measures to ensure that communities do not feel excluded, and delete the preamble. He added that there was nothing worse than a consultation being spoiled by someone saying at the last minute that they didn't know anything about it.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager advised that she would make the agreed amendments to the strategy and insert a section regarding measuring success so this could be looked at in more depth for the next meeting.

Councillor V Richichi commented that the strategy was a dry document. He asked how people would be encouraged to engage.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager acknowledged that the strategy could be dry in content. She stressed the importance of officers utilising the tools available to them to engage people. She added that the Council was getting better at attracting people. She added that face to face interaction produced better results and the Community Focus Team were very skilled at engaging with people in this manner.

In response to a comment from Councillor V Richichi, the Stronger and Safer Team Manager acknowledged that you could only ever engage with a percentage of people, and it was their right not to engage with the Council if they chose not to.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager stated that a refresh of the officer toolkit could be one of the actions arising from the Task and Finish Group. She added that it was hard to measure things that hadn't been consulted upon but she hoped that if the measure of success was less vague going forward, Members would get a better view of what the Council was doing and would have more substance to challenge officers on.

Councillor D Everitt commented that some areas did not have a tenants forum which would be a good way of engaging people. He added that the Snibston gala had a very interesting display on recycling.

Councillor V Richichi commented that the key was keeping it interesting. He added that he did not want officers to spend a vast amount of time pushing this with no return.

Councillor D Everitt commented that there was a great deal to be gained as lots of people saw the Council as not doing anything for them. He added that in some cases it was difficult to engage with those who would benefit the most.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager stated that when commencing a consultation, she tried to consider what would engage her and encourage her to get involved. She added that it would be beneficial to remind officers to do the same.

Councillor V Richichi commented that the easiest way to engage people was putting money back in their pockets.

Councillor D Everitt added that with recycling, the message there was that the more you recycle, the more you save.

Councillor V Richichi commented that the biggest problem could be linked back to planning applications, as people feel that the Council doesn't take any notice of what people say.

Councillor D Everitt noted that the development at Osgathorpe involving the pub was mentioned in the report. He stated that this issue came up at Planning Committee. He added that the development was opposed by the parish council and the villages, but it was still permitted.

Councillor V Richichi questioned how people could have faith in the Council. He added that we people needed to feel they were being listened to.

Councillor M Specht added that in respect of the Osgathorpe development, a survey was carried out and the majority of people in the village didn't respond, therefore the villagers opposing the application were in the minority. He added that people didn't want to put their head above the parapet and respond to surveys.

Councillor V Richichi commented that sometimes you cannot work on percentages.

Councillor D Everitt added that it was difficult to know whether you were backing something which was wanted by the community in any case.

Councillor S Sheahan felt that the planning system had a lot to answer for as it made consultation meaningless. He felt that attempts should be made to try and get this changed and ensure that people have realistic expectations of what the Council can do.

Councillor V Richichi commented that if the Council could get people more involved and let them feel they were contributing and were being listened to, this would achieve much greater engagement. He added that if people were to engage, the Council had to be seen to be listening to people. He added that at the moment, people feel that the Council never listens and always goes its own way. He felt that this was the core problem which needed to be addressed.

Councillor M Specht referred to the annual event held in Coleorton wood. He stated that the turnout was abysmal in the first year but had increased each year since. He added that the key was getting people to participate.

Councillor S Sheahan stated that in respect of planning, one complaint was that officers had too much time for developers prior to the application being considered by the Committee, and the local residents had the last opportunity to shape applications. He added that he found it very effective working with residents if they are knowledgeable. He felt that if this could be amplified through the planning process, it could be very effective in getting things resolved. In terms of percentages, he commented that sometimes you had to listen to the minority who were really affected. He also felt that a lot of the issue with the Council ignoring people was cultural. He added that good practice needed to be embraced and bad practice driven out.

Councillor D Everitt commented that this exercise would be worthwhile if more engagement could be achieved.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager felt that the Council needed to advertise instances where what people have said have changed processes. She added that it should also be highlighted where views have been considered but not acted upon, and say why that was.

Councillor V Richichi commented that the point made earlier in respect of percentages was spot on as some people were more affected by an issue than others.

16.   SURVEY RETURN RATES AND OUTCOMES

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager stated that in response to Councillor M Specht's request, clarity was sought from the Leisure team on the consultations they undertake. She highlighted the paper which had been circulated at the meeting.

Councillor V Richichi asked if the Council made a profit from Hermitage Leisure Centre. Councillor S Sheahan advised that it was subsidised however its performance was of an award winning level.

17.   LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager provided a summary of the Local Plan consultation process.   She advised that the Local Plan Advisory Committee was a cross party group which gave Member recommendations on how the Council should proceed with the Local Plan. She advised that there was also the Local Plan Board which was an officer group.

Councillor S Sheahan advised that he was a Member of the Local Plan Advisory Committee and at the last meeting they had received a report regarding the Statement of Community Involvement. He asked that it be ensured that the two groups co-ordinate and make sure the two policies were aligned.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager stated that the Statement of Community Involvement would be quite specific to the Local Plan.

Councillor S Sheahan agreed but felt that the general principles would be the same and the groups could learn from each other.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager advised that the original consultation period ran from 20 June to 19 September and was undertaken on the Council's website. 200 posters informing residents about the consultation were distributed to libraries, health centres and Town/Parish Councils. A consultation leaflet had been prepared to explain the consultation, and copies were sent to parish councils and shared at events. The Community Focus officers promoted engagement at the Heart of the Forest Festival in June, Picnic in the Park in June, and Music in the Park in July. 77 responses were received from members of the public, parish councils, developers, landowners and statutory bodies. A report on the outcome was considered by Cabinet on 18 November. The next issue was the Limits to Development, and the consultation for this would close on 9 January 2015. Information would be going out to Parish Clerks about their villages, and Ashby and Coalville Town teams would receive information about town centre boundaries. This would comprise of a leaflet, map and links to and electronic map and website. Consultation questions would be online. There will also be 3 events for clerks and parish councillors to come and view the plans. Officers from Planning, Communications and Community Focus will be there to answer questions to enable them to engage with the consultation either on the night or after they leave. The Stronger and Safer Team Manager advised that these events were taking place on 10, 11 and 16 December.

Councillor M Specht made reference to the huge consultation that had been undertaking regarding Leicestershire County Council discharging its liability in respect of grass verges. He asked if any more was known about why this was off the table.

Councillor S Sheahan stated that he had heard a lot of parishes were not impressed with the rates proposed.

18.   DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 8 December at 6.30pm.

The meeting commenced at 6.31 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.24 pm

Chairman's signature

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DRAFT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2015-18

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1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Community engagement is vital to making sure that North West Leicestershire is the best it can be. To get involved in making the District a better place we need local people to let us know what they think. To do this we need to provide consistent good quality and co-ordinated engagement by the Councillors and officers of the Council who influence and provide services.

1.2   This strategy outlines how we will work together to inform, consult and involve local people in decision making and improving public services in North West Leicestershire. It is for everybody who has a role to play or who wants to get involved in influencing the District's future and enhancing the quality of life for people across North West Leicestershire.

1.3   The strategy is supported by a Community Engagement Toolkit which has been developed to help Council members and officers plan and conduct consultation and engagement events. The Toolkit also outlines the process by which this activity will be co-ordinated and the information used to improve services.

2.   WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

2.1   Community engagement is not an 'add-on' service and it is not the responsibility of a single team or department. It is a commitment to involving communities across North West Leicestershire in what we do. 'Communities' is a term that does not always best reflect the complexity of how our local communities are made up. For example there are communities based around where people live, where they work, where they socialise and also communities who share similar interests, circumstances or backgrounds. We want to be in a position where everyone who chooses to can clearly see the ways in which they can engage with the Council.

2.2   Essentially, community engagement is about making sure that people can get involved and take part in a range of ways in the planning, development and delivery of services. It goes further than informing and consulting local people by seeking to enable communities to take an active part in influencing decision-making and service delivery. The main levels of community engagement are:

Levels	In other words....	What it means
Partnership	Town and Parish Council, Registered Social Landlords, Voluntary and Community Sector	Co-design through joint working, enabling Community Rights
Empowering	We help people to take responsibility for doing or running something themselves…	A group or community has achieved autonomous, independent or arms-length control over planning, commissioning, management, delivery and evaluation of projects and services; public service

		providers may have a monitoring or advisory role
Participating	We mobilise the community to help us decide what to do...	People are supported and enabled to represent their community, evaluate services, highlight specific issues and develop solutions in partnership with decision-makers
Involving	We bring people together to talk about issues and ideas…	Members of the community come together to share experiences and work collectively to identify potential solutions. Decisions on what actions to take are influenced but remain the responsibility of decision-makers
Consulting	We ask people what they think…	Measuring public opinion on an issue or proposal
Informing	We tell people something…	Information is made available to the whole community or part of it, in an accessible way

2.3 Every type of involvement is important in the community engagement process and different methods will be used depending on the activity and circumstances. Sometimes it may be appropriate to inform or consult on some activities, while at other times we will seek to involve communities and individuals in much greater depth. Our aim is to work towards devolving decision-making and supporting independent community initiatives wherever possible and to demonstrate where this type of community engagement activity can make genuine improvements to services.

2.4 To achieve this Councillors and officers should consider the table of Levels of Engagement as a hierarchy and aim to engage the highest methods of community engagement every time.

3. WHY HAVE A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY?

3.1 **National Legislation**

In April 2009, a new legal **'duty to involve'** came into force for local authorities and health. This duty:

- Requires local authorities to *"embed a culture of engagement and empowerment. This means that authorities consider, as a matter of course, the possibilities for provision of information to, consultation with involvement of representative local persons across all authority functions"*
- Highlights the need to demonstrate how stakeholders and service users are consulted, informed and involved.

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The Localism Act 2011 is committed to the decentralisation of power and devolving power from government directly to individuals and local Communities. This is about putting people back in control of decision making and handing power directly to people encouraging them to take greater responsibility for their area. If local people are to play a bigger role in society, they need the necessary information to hold an organisation to account and to take action themselves.

The Equality Act 2010 requires local authorities such as North West Leicestershire to be transparent in their engagement processes and be able to demonstrate this through publishing information about the engagement it has undertaken.

The requirement for Social Landlords to consult their tenants as defined by legislation and the Homes and Communities Agency

3.2   **Local Ambition**

The Council has a set of core values applied to all its functions;

- Deliver agreed quality
- Be fair and proud
- Listen carefully
- Support what is possible
- Spend our money wisely

These values enable us to deliver better services which strengthen the confidence and abilities of our communities not only to influence, but also take greater control of the services we provide.

We want to encourage all members of the community to take an active role in improving their own lives and those of their families, neighbours and friends. It is the role and responsibility of the Council to help and support those communities who are willing to take up the challenge of working with the Council on planning, developing and delivering a better future.

We also aim to take appropriate measures to ensure no community feels excluded from engaging with the Council.

3.3   This Strategy seeks to:
- Improve service delivery and outcomes for local people
- Ensure people can be engaged about things that matter to them
- Reduce inefficiency and duplication in engagement by the Council
- Strengthen the links between communities and the Council
- Enable local people to influence service improvements

The Community Engagement Strategy will be refreshed every three years.

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4.	WHERE ARE WE NOW?

4.1 The Council already has lots of experience of local community engagement. Some examples are mentioned below:

Community Focus – the establishment of 3 locality based teams to:

- Provide a framework for partners to work together to put plans in place so that local people can shape local services and their communities, and vice versa
- Ensure the district council has a greater understanding of its communities
- Ensure the district council can map out existing levels of community activity and draw up community profiles
- Ensure the Council and all of its services are responsible for delivering and creating the 'Improving Local Services' agenda and co-production of services

Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) - highlights the Council's guiding principals to encourage people to become involved in the planning process.

Housing Communications Strategy 2010-15 - ensures that a coordinated and strategic approach is given to all communications and consultations activity with tenants.

Council's Constitution – describes Citizens' Rights in relation to information and participation. It also outlines how the Council will respond to petitions.

Tenant Compact- encourages and supports all tenants to become more involved with the services the Council provides for them. The service seeks to find the best forms of participation for particular service issues using a variety of methods and techniques.

Youth Focus – a group of young people who work on a project focused basis by setting up self-led task and finish groups.

Business Focus – has developed a database of Engagement Champions to consult with local businesses which includes the Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, Green Footprints Business Network and Better Business for All.

4.2 However the Council recognises that its approach to community engagement could be better co-ordinated. This would reduce consultation fatigue, improve outcomes for local people and also provide better value for money.

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5. WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

5.1 The Council's vision for the future is that:

"North West Leicestershire will be a place where people and businesses feel they belong and are proud to call home".

5.2 We aim to be responsive to the needs of the community and to involve them in decision-making and shaping services. To achieve this information, consultation and involvement must be provided on the right issues targeted at the right people at the right time in an accessible way. The Council is committed to involve and empower the District's residents and communities.

5.3 This Strategy seeks to establish a more robust approach to community engagement. The following standards will be adopted to ensure that co-ordinated methods of community engagement are adhered to:

STANDARDS

a. Clarity of Purpose
Before beginning any engagement activity, we will be clear about why it is happening, what the relevance is to the people we are involving, what we want to achieve, which engagement activity we will use, what the community can and cannot influence, and how we will use the information gathered through the engagement activity.

b. Evidence Base
We will use all available research, knowledge and community intelligence including qualitative information to help us plan engagement activities. We will not carry out engagement activities if the information we need is already available. However, we recognise that sometimes the process of involving people is an end in itself to ensure that everyone is committed to the outcomes.

c. Timing
We will allow sufficient time to design and carry out engagement activities that are inclusive and encourage participation from all affected communities. We will also allow sufficient time to ensure that the results of engagement activities can shape our policies, plans and services to meet the needs of our communities.

d. Quality
We will work to ensure that officers responsible for engagement have the skills and capacity to achieve high quality engagement. We will ensure that they are aware of the barriers there can be to engagement and how they can be overcome. Equally, we will work to ensure that communities have the opportunity to develop their skills and capacity to engage if they wish.

e. Partnership

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We will identify the appropriate partners, with particular recognition of the knowledge and expertise of the voluntary and community sector, and carry out engagement activities in partnership where appropriate. This will allow us to appropriately target engagement activities and to avoid duplication of effort (this will help us to avoid 'consultation fatigue' in our communities).

f. Communication

We will always be open, honest, and accountable when sharing information and responding to contributions from all participants. We will also communicate between partners to create joined-up engagement activities and avoid duplication of effort. We will ensure there are clear referral routes for issues which arise during engagement activities.

g. Inclusion

We will support a variety of engagement activities to reflect the diversity of our communities and will be responsive to the ways that the community wants to engage with us. We will carry out equality impact assessments and endeavour to involve people in a way which meets their needs rather than ours, ensuring that there are accessible ways for them to initiate engagement. We will recognise the complexity of engaging with seldom heard groups and vulnerable groups, and people who face additional barriers to engagement, such as accessibility and transport issues.

h. Feedback

We will provide feedback to the community about the engagement activities we carry out and will explain how the community's input contributed to the decision-making process. We will explain how and when we will provide feedback to the community at the same time as we carry out the community engagement exercise. We will also make the feedback as widely available as possible.

i. Monitoring & Review

We will monitor and review the engagement activities we carry out to ensure that all sections of the community have the opportunity to engage should they choose to, particularly those whose voices are often not heard, and change our practices accordingly. We will evaluate effectiveness and share learning.

j. Resources

We will plan engagement activity and underpinning community development activity carefully in the light of what those activities seek to achieve and in the context of available resources and will communicate any constraints clearly.

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KEY AIMS

5.4   Our key aims are set out below:

AIM 1: To strengthen, develop and sustain opportunities for all local people to influence what happens in their communities

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5.5   We will help and support local people, using the lessons learned from our engagement experiences so far, ensuring we continue to involve people in decision making. Local people will then have the confidence and ability to influence what happens in their communities, whether those communities are based on geography or special interest.

5.6   We will also provide opportunities for communities to shape and influence the development and delivery of quality services and policies that reflect local needs and priorities.

5.7   We will ensure that community engagement activities provide opportunities for participation for all sections of the community, particularly people and groups that are often missed out of community engagement activities.

AIM 2: To listen, be responsive & feedback to the community

5.8   The Council values informed and constructive challenge and views on proposals relating to service delivery. We recognise the importance of feedback to the community in response to all forms of communication including consultation surveys and requests for information. We will ensure feedback to participants about the outcomes of consultation and community engagement.

AIM 3: To improve the community engagement knowledge and skills of our officers and Members

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5.9   The Council recognises that community engagement is the responsibility of both officers and Councillors. It will ensure that the necessary tools and training are available to help plan and deliver appropriate engagement that is effective, efficient and informed.

AIM 4: To support the management of collected data and results

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5.10   The Council recognises that data needs to be collected in an ethical and consistent way. It will develop improved data sets, by population and area, and compare differences in responses that could lead to a better understanding of equality and locality issues.

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5.11 This information is captured through our Citizenspace software which we use to provide on line consultations.

6. HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE OUR AIMS?

6.1 It is not intended to develop a separate action plan to deliver this Community Engagement Strategy. The Council's aims and objectives will be delivered through the Council's Delivery Plan, Service & Team Plans and Single Partnership Equality and Diversity Scheme action plan. This will avoid duplication and also help to ensure that the engagement of local residents, businesses, partner organisations and visitors is mainstreamed into the day-to-day work of the Council's services.

7. MEASURING SUCCESS

7.1 We will produce an annual report itemising the consultations that have been undertaken each year.

7.2 Within this report we will identify which consultation methods were used within each consultation and how many people responded to each method to enable us to evaluate the effectiveness of each.

7.3 We will also record the age, gender, ethnicity and location of respondents, enabling us to understand who we engage with and to target those who do not normally respond, enabling wider consultation within the district.

7.4 The outcomes of our consultations will be presented on the Council's website

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