



EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

# East Cambridgeshire District Council

## Community Engagement Strategy 2018-2023

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## **Forward**

I am pleased to present the Community Engagement Strategy 2018-23 which outlines the Council's ambitions and commitments to the residents of East Cambridgeshire.

As the district continues to evolve and communities change, it is fundamental that effective engagement mechanisms are in place so that all residents have the opportunity to engage with the Council and have their say regarding the services and resources that they need. The Council recognises that change is a fundamental part of growth and effective change must come from within individuals and groups. It is important that our language, attitudes and views embrace the role of community engagement in response to growth and changing community needs.

This strategy looks at the importance of the varying forms of engagement, as well as the evolving nature of the district. It aims to ensure that community engagement is at the forefront of all Council services, turning our commitment of improving the lives of residents into a reality.

Councillor David Ambrose-Smith  
Chairman of Community Services

## **Executive Summary**

The East Cambridgeshire Community Engagement Strategy has been developed to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to engage with the Council and have their say regarding the services and resources that they need. Councils are at the heart of local democracy and it is therefore essential for us to ensure that all sections of our local community have the opportunity to have their say on the services they need and use.

The Council's Corporate Plan 2017-19 aims to make East Cambridgeshire a fantastic place to live, work and visit; whilst improving infrastructure and local transport; in order for the Council to achieve these aims, it is essential that the Council understands what the residents of the district want.

This strategy builds on the positive work currently being done and sets out what we mean by engagement, why we are committed to engaging with our communities and partners and how we plan to engage now and in the future. The strategy seeks to embed community engagement into everyday working practices as we recognise that engagement should not be a one-off activity, but provide the fundamental basis of everything we do.

## **What does the Community Engagement Strategy aim to achieve?**

This Community Engagement Strategy aims to have effective engagement mechanisms in place to develop and support communities to be strong, active and inclusive, who are informed and involved in decision-making and enable the Council to provide services that meet the needs of residents and enhance then quality of life of communities across East Cambridgeshire.

This strategy seeks to ensure that effective engagement takes place when changes to policies or services are being proposed and that the views and opinions of those possibly affected are heard, understood and valued.

The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Ensure appropriate and accessible methods of engagement are in place and utilised to maximise participation
- Raise the profile of community engagement and the council's responsibilities in relation to it
- Provide timely and quality feedback to consultees so that they know how their views have made a difference
- Maximise equality of community engagement practices and ensure that the views of harder to reach groups are heard
- Ensure the views and knowledge of partners, stakeholders and communities are considered in relation to services that relate to them
- Develop the Council's ability to effectively utilise community engagement practices
- Provide a user friendly point of reference for all staff to use

## **Introduction**

### What is community engagement?

Communities can mean different things to different people and there are many different groups that make up a living 'community'. Broadly speaking, there are two types of community that are commonly referred to as 'communities of place' and 'communities of Interest'.

'Community of place' is defined by a geographical area with physical boundaries, for example a village or parish in East Cambridgeshire, or a housing estate. These communities may have similar concerns about issues that affect their local area.

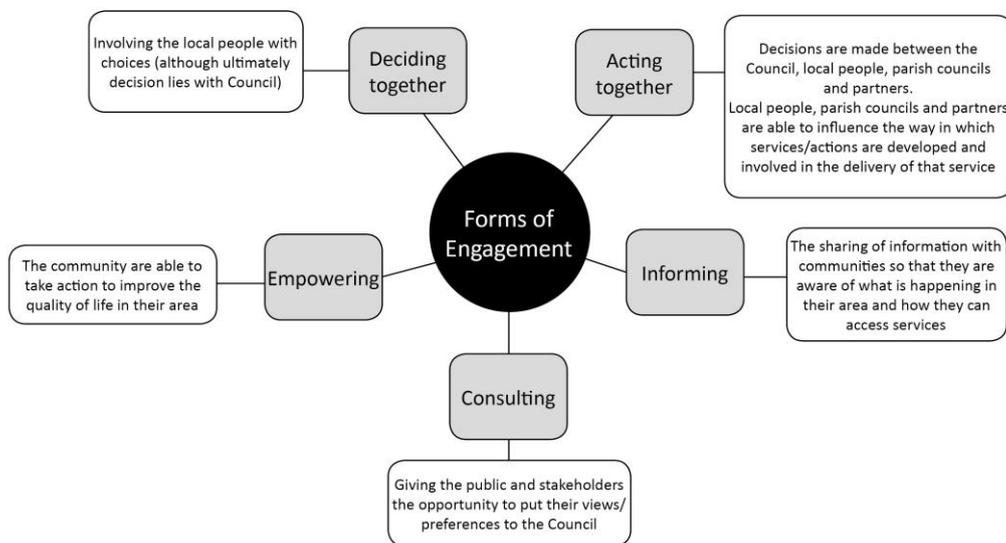
'Community of interest' is defined by a shared interest, experience or situation; examples include young people, disabled people and sports clubs. Additionally there are people who are concerned about specific issues for example the environment or crime and each of these communities of interest may require a different way to engage or be engaged.

The Council recognises that different communities will have different needs that need to be balanced and taken into consideration when delivering services and initiatives. Community engagement is about having the mechanisms in place to enable people to get involved in the services they need.

## Forms of Engagement

Community engagement can take many different forms. Each type of involvement is important to help the Council with its decision-making and service provision. It may not always be possible to reach consensus around issues, however greater involvement and participation will bring about better understanding of sometimes complex issues. The Council uses a variety of community engagement methods which range from active involvement to passive involvement depending on the activity and circumstances.

The diagram below illustrates the various forms of engagement used by the Council:



## Benefits of Engagement

The Council recognises that residents have a wealth of knowledge and information regarding their communities as well as a first-hand insight to the matters faced, solutions desired and services required. Many of the Council's priorities will only be achieved if communities are engaged and contribute their knowledge and resources.

Local experience and national evidence demonstrate that there are benefits to both communities and the Council when engagement is undertaken, including:

- More efficient and effective services that better reflect the needs of service users and have higher levels of customer satisfaction;
- A reduction in community inequalities;
- Safer and stronger communities, with a more attractive built environment that meets the people's needs;
- Strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the Council;
- Greater local ownership of Council services;
- A better understanding of how and why local services need to change and develop;
- Improved local reputation;
- Greater job satisfaction for Council staff to see that the services they provide are meeting expressed local needs.

## ECDC Consultation Principles

In order to provide clear guidance to staff on conducting consultations, the Council has adopted the following consultation principles which complement the National Government's Consultation Principles 2018<sup>1</sup>:

- Consultations should be clear and concise
- Consultations should have a purpose
- Consultations should be informative
- Consultations are only part of a process of engagement
- Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time
- Consultations should be targeted
- Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted and use innovative and creative mechanisms to engage with people whose voices aren't usually heard
- Consultations should be agreed before publication and ensure the views and knowledge of partners, stakeholders and communities are considered in relation to services that relate to them
- Consultation should facilitate scrutiny
- Responses to consultations should be published in a timely fashion

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/691383/Consultation\\_Principles\\_1\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/691383/Consultation_Principles_1_.pdf)

## Context

The National Planning Policy Framework 2012 encourages local communities to get involved in the development of Local Plans and planning decisions that affect their area. The Council has a role in supporting this, and helping to facilitate neighbourhood planning. The Council also has a duty to cooperate with neighbouring councils and other public bodies.

The Council has encouraged pre-application consultation for large scale development for some time and now the Localism Act 2011 formally requires this.

The Localism Act 2011 is an Act of Parliament that changes the powers of local government in England. The aim of the act is to facilitate the devolution of decision-making powers from central government control to individuals and communities. The measures affected by the Act include an increase in the number of elected mayors, referendums and the "Local authority's general power of competence".

The Act introduced powers that directly relate to Council conduct. These include:

- general power of competence; which gives councils the same broad powers as an individual to do anything unless it is prohibited by statute.
- pre-determination; the Act clarifies the rules around pre-determination and makes it clear that it is proper for councillors to play an active part in local discussions, and that they should not be liable to legal challenge as a result.

The Localism Act 2011 places a legal duty on local planning authorities and public bodies to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis to maximise the effectiveness of Local Plan preparation in context of strategic cross boundary matters. This is known as the 'duty to comply.'

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 introduced a duty on local authorities to involve, inform and consult representatives of local persons where it is appropriate and lawful to do so.<sup>2</sup>

The Government's Revised Best Value Statutory Guidance Consultation Paper (for England) (February 2015)<sup>3</sup> states that "authorities are under a Duty to Consult representatives of a wide range of local persons; this is not optional. Authorities must consult representatives of council tax payers, those who use or are likely to use services provided by the authority, and those appearing to the authority to have an interest in any area within which the authority carries out functions."

The Statement of Community Involvement sets out how East Cambridgeshire District Council will involve and consult with the public and wider stakeholders when planning for the future of the district. The Statement of Community Involvement covers consultation arrangements in respect of both planning applications and planning policy matters, such as the preparation of a new Local Plan.

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<sup>2</sup> Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, 2007, paragraph 138.

<sup>3</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/408077/Revised\\_Best\\_Value\\_Statutory\\_Guidance\\_Consultation\\_Paper\\_for\\_England\\_2\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/408077/Revised_Best_Value_Statutory_Guidance_Consultation_Paper_for_England_2_.pdf)

The Cambridgeshire Compact is a partnership arrangement between statutory bodies and the voluntary and community sector, which has been designed to improve relationships and provide a framework within which to understand what to expect from each other.

Engagement and consultation activity is already included within many of the Council's Service Plans and policies such as the ECDC Single Equality Scheme. The Single Equality Scheme is the Council's commitment to meeting the duties placed upon us by the equality legislation. Specifically, this relates to the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. A key measure in the Act – the public sector Equality Duty, ensures that all public bodies play their part in making society fairer by tackling discrimination. It means that the Council has to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to its own employees. Beyond the legal duties, the Council's Single Equality Scheme sets out the Council's commitment to taking equality and human rights into account in everything we do, whether that's providing services to our local population, employing people, developing policies or communicating and involving people in our work. An objective of the scheme is to broaden the Council's consultation processes and improve community engagement so that local residents and service users feel empowered to influence the way the Council's services are provided before priorities are agreed.

## Local evidence supporting the need for community engagement

### Key drivers for community engagement

East Cambridgeshire is a predominantly rural district located to the north-east of Cambridge within the county of Cambridgeshire. The district covers an area of 655km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of approximately 87,800<sup>4</sup> which is estimated to increase to 98,200 by 2031.<sup>5</sup>

The largest population settlements in East Cambridgeshire are Ely, Soham, Littleport and Burwell. Together, these comprise approximately 56% of the district's population, with the remaining population is spread between about 50 villages.<sup>6</sup>

The emerging East Cambs Local Plan identifies that most places in the district will experience some growth, in particularly most medium, large and main settlements as identified in the Plan's Policy LP3: The Settlement Hierarchy and the Countryside<sup>7</sup>. The Emerging Local Plan identifies that new communities will be built in Ely, Kennett, Littleport and Soham. Creating new communities is not just about the building of physical infrastructure and new dwellings; it is vital that consideration is given to the people that will inhabit the area. Developing and sustaining successful new communities can be achieved by empowering residents to develop and sustain new community groups, social networks and activities to shape and create a strong sense of community and belonging. Such development work in new communities can lead to reduced isolation and loneliness leading to better mental and physical health, increased opportunities to help others, wider circle of relationships and local contacts, access to reliable local information and increased feelings of safety and security.

There are a number of harder to reach groups in East Cambs therefore it is important that practices are in place to reach these communities. Harder to reach groups include non English speakers, ethnic minority groups, travelling community, homeless people, people with disabilities, elderly and younger people, people in areas of deprivation and people that are digitally isolated.

In East Cambridgeshire over recent years, the top five countries from which National Insurance Number (NINo) registrations have been received are Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Portugal. These countries constitute a large proportion of (74.7% or 728 out of 974) of all NINo registrations in East Cambridgeshire for 2014/15.<sup>8</sup>

East Cambridgeshire has an ageing population, despite predicted growth in the total sizes of all age groups by 2031; the proportion of children and young people that

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<sup>4</sup> ONS Population estimates - local authority based by five year age band (2016)

<sup>5</sup> Cambridgeshire Annual demographic and socio-economic report 2011. Cambridgeshire County Council. This report based it's figures on the 2031 figures from ONS 2008-based sub-national population projections.

<sup>6</sup> East Cambridgeshire Local Plan Further Draft – January 2017

<sup>7</sup>

<https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/CD05A%20Proposed%20Submission%20Local%20Plan.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Community Safety Strategic Assessment Quarter Two: Exploitation, Cohesion and Community Engagement November 2015. Figures in report from Department of Work and Pensions

make up the population is forecast to decrease whilst the proportion of older people increases.

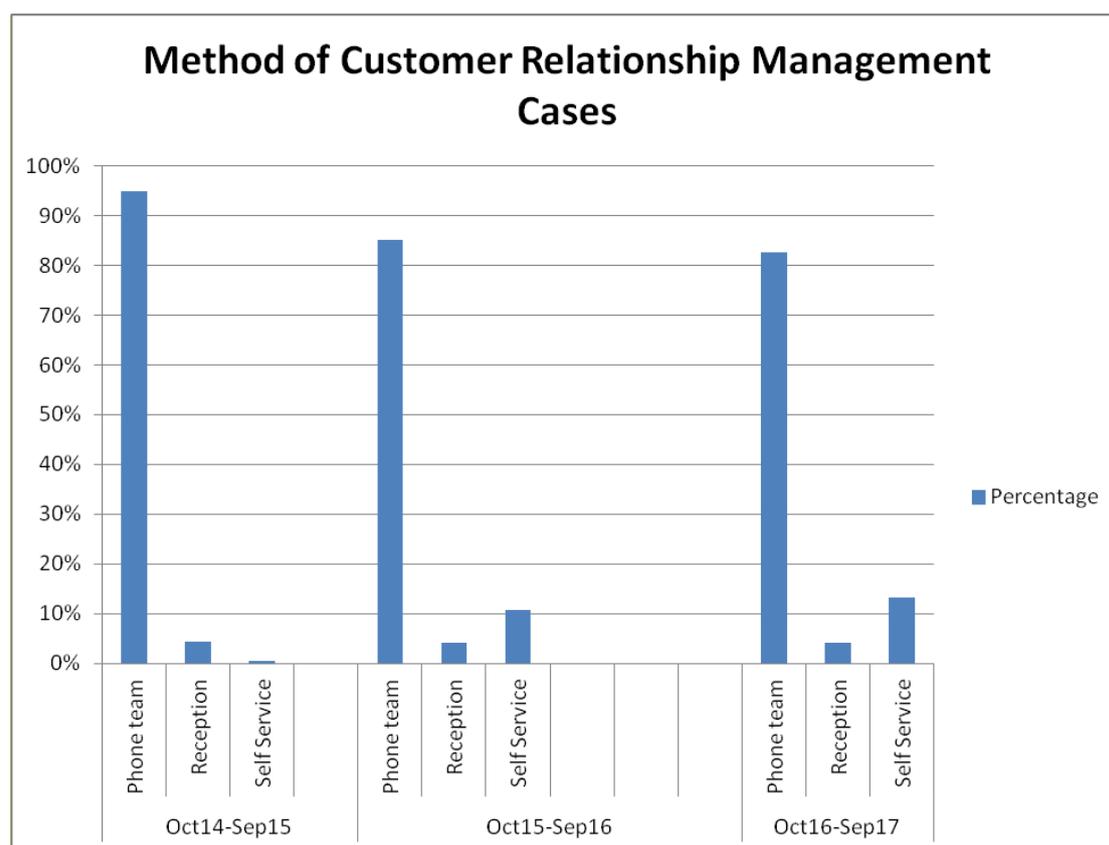
Whilst East Cambridgeshire is relatively prosperous, there are differences across the district. There are some areas that have higher levels of deprivation including Ely East, Littleport West, Littleport East and Ely North.<sup>9</sup>

More people are using their mobile phones to access the Council's website, and less people are using desktop computers and tablets, illustrated in Table 1.0 below:

How people are accessing the ECDC website			
	Desktop	Mobile	Tablet
April 2015 - March 2016	58.78%	23.11%	18.12%
April 2016 - March 2017	58.42%	26.09%	15.49%
April 2017 - March 2018	53.45%	31.28%	15.26%

Table 1.0

Graph 1.0 illustrates that the proportion of Customer Relations Management cases generated by phone calls is decreasing and the number of cases generated due to people utilising the Self Service online system is increasing.



Graph 1.0 illustrates the methods of how Customer Relationship Management cases are generated between October 2014 – September 2017

<sup>9</sup> Cambridgeshire: Indices of Deprivation 2015, Cambridgeshire Atlas

In August 2018, the ECDC Twitter account had 3,134 followers. The account was set up in April 2011 and Prominent PR took over the management of the account in June 2016. The Council's Planning department also has a Twitter account which posts all determinations and validations.

The Council's Facebook the account was created in August 2016. In August 2018, the page had 529 'likes'.

It is important that the Council continue to monitor the ways in which people are accessing information and services; and be mindful of technological trends so that the Council can respond accordingly.

## **How the Council intends to engage with communities and implement the Community Engagement Strategy**

We recognise that the Council alone cannot achieve the ambitions in this strategy. Everyone has a part to play in making this Community Engagement Strategy work, including:

- all East Cambridgeshire residents
- elected members
- Council staff and departments
- Other authorities and agencies
- Specific groups - families, school children, young people, older people, people with disabilities, faith groups
- Harder to reach groups - minority ethnic groups, migrant workers, travellers and gypsies
- Local groups
- Local businesses
- Parish Councils
- Community and voluntary sector
- Partnerships

We will work with other organisations, groups and individuals from the community, voluntary and private sectors to make sure that engagement activities influence the future direction of the district.

We know that we need to work closely with communities to encourage effective community engagement and ensure that processes are flexible and can be tailored to different groups and individuals in different areas of the district. We understand that sometimes people can be reluctant to get involved and we will work with other partners to ensure that community engagement is as straightforward as possible and targeted appropriately.

### Working with Parish, Town and City Councils

The Council works with and supports parish councils, for example, through the delivery of Parish Council Conferences. Working with parish, town and the City councils is a key aspect of the Council's community engagement work.

### Partnership working

The Council works with other agencies such as youth groups and the Police, and through partnerships such as the East Cambs Community Safety Partnership, to develop and deliver shared community engagement practices.

### Departmental engagement practices and commitments

This section outlines specific key engagement practices that different Council department deliver:

<p>Communities and Partnerships</p>	<p>Management of the Council's Register of Consultees to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to provide input into changes in Council services</p> <p>Stakeholder and user feedback on riverside enforcement scheme and improvement plans to inform proposals and decisions</p> <p>Delivery of Parish Council Conferences to provide a platform for parishes to meet each other and share best practice and ideas, potential for joint working. Ensure parishes are have the opportunity to engage with public organisations face to face</p> <p>Feedback from service users via onsite consultation (e.g. at Ely Riverside and Ely Country Park)</p> <p>Engagement with the community and voluntary sector via attending Compact Group meetings and other partnership meetings to ensure ECDC is aware of any changes that could affect service delivery, and update partners of related ECDC work</p> <p>Provide information to enable communities to understand their rights under the Localism Act 2011</p>
<p>Democratic Services</p>	<p>Delivery of Local District &amp; Parish Council Elections</p> <p>Public Question Time at Committees &amp; Public Speaking at Planning &amp; Licensing Committees and Public Petitions Scheme to allow individuals/groups to express their views on relevant issues, policies, applications and projects</p> <p>Consultation on Polling Districts, Polling Places &amp; Polling Stations Reviews and Community Governance Reviews in accordance with statutory requirements</p>
<p>Environmental Services</p>	<p>Engaging with the community and voluntary sector including businesses to ensure that we modify our internal procedures (subject to regulatory requirements) and to meet the needs of our customers, reduce complaints against officers and improve customer satisfaction and to ensure that businesses are kept informed of relevant health and safety incidents that allow them to improve their own safety</p>
<p>Infrastructure and Strategic Housing</p>	<p>Circulation of Growth Delivery Newsletter to Members of the public and organisations that have expressed an interest in growth projects in the district and requested to be included on the mailing list to keep people informed of progress with projects and developments across the district.</p>

	<p>Delivery of Parish Council Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Forums to provide information about CIL and how Parishes can submit projects for consideration for CIL funding.</p> <p>To facilitate Joint East Cambridgeshire and Cambridgeshire County Council Member and Officer Steering Group for Planning and Transport meetings to discuss the development of the Transport Strategy for East Cambridgeshire (TSEC) and CIL.</p>
Human Resources	Consultation on the Council's Single Equality Scheme 2020-2024 to seek feedback on the revised scheme
Licensing	Taxi Forums to discuss taxi related matters with relevant parties
Open Spaces	Engagement with local Friends groups to share ideas and discuss relevant works/issues
Planning	<p>For planning applications the consultation process is defined by statute, i.e. the Council must follow this process, and provides who the Council must consult with, how and when.</p> <p>The relevant person or organisation will be consulted when a planning application has been received by the planning authority; this will give the relevant person or organisation time to make representations. Where an application has had material amendments, the relevant person or organisation will be re-consulted and given time to make representations on the changes. The planning officer will consider all representations that are made during the planning application determination period.</p> <p>It is important to note that, when determining a planning application, the planning officer can only consider issues that are a material planning consideration.</p> <p>More information on material planning considerations and for guidance on commenting on planning applications please visit the Councils website:  <a href="https://www.eastcamb.gov.uk/planning/commenting-planning-application">https://www.eastcamb.gov.uk/planning/commenting-planning-application</a></p> <p>Hold Agents Forums to gather feedback and share information</p> <p>Specific letters posted to targeted relevant addresses to obtain feedback/views on specific planning applications</p> <p>Engagement with local access group to obtain views on planning applications in terms of accessibility for people with disabilities.</p> <p>Consultation with external agencies for advice/comments on impact of specific applications</p> <p>East Cambs Planning Facebook and Twitter pages to enable customers to engage and receive information on all validated and decisions.</p> <p>Quarterly newsletters issued to agents, Parish Councils and ECDC</p>

	<p>Members.</p> <p>Site notices are put up at application sites seeking views on applications</p> <p>Applications which fall within certain categories are advertised in the Cambridge Evening News</p>
Financial Services	<p>Notify public when the Council's accounts are available for inspection</p>
Strategic Planning	<p>Management of the Planning Policy database of Consultees to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to comment on planning policy documents at various stages</p> <p>Delivery of Parish Conferences to provide additional information and answer questions with parish councils. This also provides a platform for parishes to meet each other and share best practice and ideas, potential for joint working.</p> <p>Provide information to enable communities and individuals to understand planning policies that will help them to engage in the planning process and to ensure that clear and accurate information is provided to enable them to make effective contribution to the planning process in line with the Statement of Community Involvement.</p>
Leisure Services	<p>Completion of the East Cambs Let's Get Moving survey with schools, clubs and groups to understand the needs and/or limitations of potential customers</p> <p>Promotion of services via Facebook and webpages</p> <p>Participation in campaigns promoting healthy lifestyles, eating and exercise</p> <p>Partnership meetings with sports centres, governing bodies, clubs and societies to ensure the suitability of any choices made (e.g. new club set up)</p> <p>Regular informal communication with groups that engage volunteers to identify potential individuals who may take on projects in the future</p>
Housing	<p>Provide representation and support to Community Hubs, working alongside a range of other public and private organisations providing a range of services and an opportunity for engagement for vulnerable people. Community Hubs provide support for people dealing with a variety of issues including debt, alcohol and drug dependency, mental health issues, housing related concerns and any other support needs.</p> <p>Customer satisfaction surveys issued to all clients. Negative feedback is followed up to seek improvement.</p> <p>Parish council meetings to promote services and the Community Hub (planned in advance and as requested)</p>

	<p>Representation on a range of multi-agency partnerships such as the East Cambs Community Safety Partnership and housing provider liaison meetings.</p> <p>Multi-agency public meetings to address specific areas of focus, such as anti-social behaviour in a particular community.</p>
Performance Management	<p>The End of Year Council report is completed in the second quarter of the year in readiness for full Council in July. The report details the achievements of the Council against its Corporate Priorities and highlights projects which have had a direct impact on local residents from the previous year. In addition, it shows which projects we will be focussing on in the coming year. The report is sent to every property across East Cambridgeshire and is available on the Council's website.</p>

### Shared Council engagement practices

This section details the engagement commitments of all Council departments to ensure that everyone is involved in community engagement activity in various forms:

- Consult on policy reviews relating to all areas of service delivery to ensure that the public and businesses have the opportunity to put forward their views on policy changes that may impact on them
- regular meetings with Service Delivery Champions
- Maintaining webpage content to ensure that information is accessible, relevant and up to date
- Comply with the Equality Act and the ECDC Single Equality Scheme, and complete Equality Impact Assessments where appropriate
- Ensure information is available in a number of formats both digitally and in print (e.g. notice boards, leaflets)
- Making use of local press by issuing of notices and press releases
- Utilising the Council's social media platforms

### **How decisions are made**

The Council's Constitution<sup>10</sup> outlines which part of the Council or individual has responsibility for making particular types of decisions or decisions relating to particular areas of functions. It outlines the principles that underpin all decisions made by the Council, including:

- (a) proportionality (i.e. the action must be proportionate to the intended outcome);
- (b) due consultation and the taking of professional advice from officers;
- (c) respect for human rights;
- (d) a presumption in favour of openness;
- (e) clarity of aims and desired outcomes;
- (f) having regard to all relevant considerations and ignoring all irrelevant ones;
- (g) a realistic evaluation of any alternative;
- (h) due consultation through effective access for the public to decision-making and decision makers.

<sup>10</sup><https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Part%20of%20the%20Constitution.pdf>

## **General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)**

In line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, East Cambridgeshire District Council is fully committed to protect the privacy of our constituents, staff and members. We ensure the safe processing of personal data through strict guidelines for collection, storage and retention of information. Where appropriate, data sharing protocols are entered into and robust security measures are in place. The Council maintains its Public Services Network compliance, demonstrating its on-going commitment to supporting best practice in the maintenance and handling of data.

For further information contact: The Data Protection Officer, The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB7 4EE (email: [dataprotection@eastcambs.gov.uk](mailto:dataprotection@eastcambs.gov.uk))

## **How we will measure success**

- Delivery of the Community Engagement Action Plan
- Monitoring and reporting on the performance of this strategy and action plan annually through the Service Planning Process
- Acting on feedback from our inspections and external assessments of performance
- Participating in countywide forums that provide the opportunity to share and learn from best practice
- Completion of Equality Impact Assessments for all reports relating to potential changes in service delivery to demonstrate that the needs of all user groups have been considered