

## Rother District Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	24 May 2021
<b>Title:</b>	Updated Statement of Community Involvement
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Service Strategy and Planning
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Vine-Hall
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	To approve the draft Statement of Community Involvement for a six-week public consultation
<b>Decision Type:</b>	Non-Key
<b>Officer</b>	
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>	It be <b>RESOLVED</b> : That the draft updated Statement of Community Involvement as attached at Appendix 1 be approved for public consultation.
<b>Reasons for Recommendations:</b>	The risk of not updating the Statement of Community Involvement is that future consultations may be deemed to not comply with recent updates to planning legislation particular in relation to the Duty to Co-operate.

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### Introduction

1. This report presents a draft updated 'Statement of Community Involvement' (SCI), attached as Appendix 1, which sets out how and when the Council will carry out consultations and involve the community in both the preparation of planning policy documents and in the determination of planning applications. The updated SCI is put forward for approval in draft form for the purposes of public consultation at this stage.
2. While the existing SCI, adopted in 2018, continues to meet most statutory requirements in terms of plan-making, there is now a greater focus on early engagement. The changes relating to the closure of the Rye Community Help-Point (where planning policy documents would typically be made available for public viewing) will have an impact on how documents can be made publicly available. Recent changes to public speaking at Planning Committee have also been incorporated into this version of the SCI.
3. It is considered timely to update the SCI, in advance of any statutory consultation on the forthcoming new Local Plan. The consultation timeframe is set out in the current [Local Development Scheme](#) (March 2021). It should be noted that in any event, Regulation 10A (1) (b) of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Amendments) Regulations 2017 now requires Councils to review SCIs at least every five years.

4. The review also provides the opportunity to bring the SCI up-to-date in its coverage of the recent changes to public speaking at meetings of the Planning Committee.
5. It is pointed out that the SCI deals only with planning processes. It does not deal with planning policy but sets out how the Council will involve different sectors of the community, from individual members of the public through to representative organisations, in preparing plans that do address such matters, as well as in considering planning applications.

## **Analysis / Details of the proposals**

### *a. Early engagement on plan-making and the Duty to Do-operate*

6. The approach to pre-production and early engagement on the Local Plan is set out within Section 3 of the SCI. Table A sets out how early engagement will be undertaken, setting out the statutory requirements and where the District Council will carry out informal engagement. This is more detailed than the previous SCI and indicates how the District Council will engage with stakeholders and the public, where appropriate.

### *b. Public speaking at Planning Committee*

7. Since adopting the SCI in 2018, there have been some recent changes made to the process of public speaking at Planning Committee. A review was recently undertaken with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee to review the process and a number of changes have now been implemented. These are now proposed to be included formally within this newest version of the SCI.

### *c. Increased scope of engagement using new online platforms*

8. The Coronavirus pandemic has seen the emergence of videoconferencing through software such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom. The new SCI incorporates these widely used videoconferencing platforms within the potential full range of engagement methods, in order that the Council may capitalise on the increased engagement opportunities that they provide.

### *Other minor changes*

9. It should also be noted that the SCI has been subject to a number of minor modifications throughout the document and the format/presentation changes to improve legibility and be visually clearer, including adding a flow diagram for Local Plans, SPDs and NPs to set out within a page what the overall process is.
10. The SCI also refers to the Council's temporary Coronavirus Addendum (originally published in August 2020), which sits alongside the SCI and was produced in accordance with Government guidance and temporary changes in legislation. The Addendum identifies methods of engagement that may no longer be practicable under the conditions of the pandemic and sets out how Council's Strategy and Planning Service can safely continue to carry out its consultation and engagement responsibilities during these times.

## Next Steps

11. It is proposed that the draft SCI attached as Appendix 1 is published for public consultation for a six-week period.
12. Following the consultation, any comments received will be considered in finalising the document and re-presented to Cabinet for adoption in due course.
13. The updated SCI will provide a clear, transparent basis for carrying out consultations on future plans – to which the Council may be held to account – and will provide a useful reference to all interested parties on what involvement they can expect to have in planning decisions.

## Conclusion

14. It is recommended that the draft updated SCI be published for public consultation, as set out above.

## Legal Implications

15. The risk of not updating the SCI is that future consultations may be deemed to not comply with recent updates to planning legislation particular in relation to the Duty to Co-operate. There is a risk of creating unrealistic expectations of community engagement via a new SCI, especially given resource constraints, but the proposed SCI maintains flexibility on approaches to take such factors into account.

## Other Implications

16. It is noted that the 2018 SCI was subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment, which is still relevant and it applies to the 2021 updated SCI.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	Ye
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	Yes
Environmental	No	Access to Information	No
Sustainability	No	Exempt from publication	No
Risk Management	No		

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Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Proposed Updated Statement of Community Involvement
Relevant Previous Minutes:	N/A
Background Papers:	Rother District Council Statement of Community Involvement, Adopted 2018
Reference Documents:	None