

## Rother District Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	4 October 2021
<b>Title:</b>	Updated Statement of Community Involvement
<b>Report of:</b>	Ben Hook
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Jonathan Vine-Hall
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	To approve the draft Statement of Community Involvement 2021 for adoption at full Council
<b>Decision Type:</b>	Non-Key
<b>Officer Recommendation(s):</b>	<b>Recommendation to COUNCIL:</b> That the updated Statement of Community Involvement attached as Appendix A be approved and adopted, with any comments being reported verbally to full Council.
<b>Reasons for Recommendations:</b>	The risk of not updating the SCI is that future consultations may be deemed not to comply with recent updates to planning legislation particularly 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 A, 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 formal adoption by the Council following a six-week public consultation which took place between 11 June – 23 July 2021.
2. Following this period of public consultation, the draft updated SCI has been the subject of a small number of minor amendments since it was last presented to Cabinet on 24 May where it was approved for public consultation. These amendments are set out in the Consultation Summary Report, attached as Appendix B.
3. None of the amendments made as a result of the public consultation have changed the substance of the draft updated SCI. In view of this, the description

of the draft updated SCI presented to Cabinet 24 May is still relevant, and is set out below, except for explanation in paragraph 11 of other recent minor changes to the draft document not related to the public consultation but which have been made to reflect ongoing improvements to our engagement processes.

## **Context of the update**

4. 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.
5. 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 5 years.
6. 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, as well as other recent minor changes within the Planning Service.
7. 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*

8. 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*

9. 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

10. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen the emergence of video conferencing through software such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom. The new SCI incorporates these widely used video conferencing 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

11. It should also be noted that the SCI has been subject to a number of minor modifications throughout the document and the format/presentation changed 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. The minor modifications, which are the result of ongoing improvements to our engagement processes include, most notably, a new paragraph in the introduction which highlights the role of the Planning Service Review in improving how we communicate and engage with our community.
12. 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.

**Conclusion**

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.
14. Following the six-week public consultation on the draft updated SCI which took place between 11 June – 23 July, and its incorporation of subsequent minor modifications, it is concluded that the draft updated SCI be recommended to Council for adoption.
15. Comments made today will be recorded and reported verbally to full Council.

**Financial Implications**

16. None

## Legal Implications

17. The risk of not updating the SCI is that future consultations may be deemed to not comply with recent updates to planning legislation, particularly 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.

## Human Resources Implications

18. None

## Equalities and Diversity

19. The 2018 SCI was subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment. This is still relevant, however it has been updated to reflect the 2021 updated SCI.

Other Implications		Applies?	Other Implications		Applies?
Human Rights		No	Equalities and Diversity		Yes
Crime and Disorder		No	Consultation		Yes
Environmental		No	Access to Information		No
Sustainability		No	Exempt from publication		No
Risk Management		No			
Executive Director:		Malcolm Johnston			
Proper Officer:		Ben Hook			
Report Contact Officer:		Ben.hook@rother.gov.uk			
e-mail address:					
Appendices:		A	Draft 2021 Statement of Community Involvement Consultation Summary Report		
	B				
Relevant Previous Minutes:					
Background Papers:		None			
Reference Documents:		None			