Community Engagement   **Project Sponsor** Karen Satterford, Wycombe District Council
                            Project Manager Charles Meakings, Wycombe District Council

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1.   Recommendation

The Joint Improvement Board is asked to approve the project scope for community engagement as set out in this report, including the allocation of £10,000 towards pump-priming costs for community mapping work.

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2.   Project vision/objectives

2.1   Our vision for community engagement is to ensure more responsive public sector services, develop more cohesive communities and strengthen the community leadership role of elected Councillors of all three tiers of local government in Buckinghamshire.

2.2   Community engagement is a process by which Buckinghamshire councils will inform, consult, involve and devolve to local communities with the objective of empowering communities. Methods of achieving this are outlined at Appendix 1.

2.3   There will be one agreed framework across Buckinghamshire (as agreed in the Pathfinder submission), operating at two levels:

2.3.1   **Local level** Face-to-face engagement mechanisms for each community led by the local Councillors, focused on the sense of place, with the chosen mechanisms used depending on the needs of the area. This will be supplemented by arrangements for communities of type (e.g. older and younger people) which will be at different levels of engagement according to purpose (local, district or county); and

2.3.2   **Sub-district (or district level if appropriate) Public Sector Forum** to consider issues raised from the local level and feedback on action. This would comprise the elected Councillors from all three-tiers and other Public Sector providers, especially Police, key voluntary sector partners and Health. The presumption would be to use the building blocks of the GC2C model as outlined in the pathfinder bid, with the precise arrangement depending on what best fits the local circumstances and capacity of each district. This would be the Forum for council and partner engagement, not primarily for community engagement, although the Forum would consider the output of community engagement within the area.

2.4   Once this framework is agreed discussions will commence on a district by district basis as to the most appropriate arrangements for each area and the implementation date.

4.   Scope

4.1   Within scope
The following activities are included in this Project:

- District and county existing community engagement mechanisms (communities of place and type), including the Buckinghamshire County Council's GC2C principles and areas.

- Thames Valley Police, Bucks Fire and Rescue and Health community engagement approaches

- The front-line community leadership role of elected representatives at all three-tiers of local government.

- Devolution and consultation arrangements with Town and Parish Councils and the role of the voluntary and community sector in community engagement.

- Responding to the new statutory and other requirements from the Local Government Bill regarding the proposed new duty to inform, consult, involve and devolve to local communities.

4.2 Out of scope
The following activities are **not** included in this Project:

- Developing and delivering responsive services based on issues and needs raised through the community engagement process. (covered by other Pathfinder work streams).

- Individual customer service improvements (covered by other Pathfinder work streams).

5 Benefits

5.1 Financial
£250,000 (mix of non-cashable and cashable) savings over six years (by March 2014) through lower operating costs, for example:
- reducing the number of community engagement meetings;
- reduced meeting attendance through generically trained officers able to link with communities for all three tiers of local government;
- streamlined operating arrangements for Public Sector Forums; and
- using existing mechanisms wherever possible, rather than creating new ones.

Detailed mapping of current resources and access mechanisms is currently being undertaken.

5.2 Non financial
- A clearer and simpler way for people to engage with Public Sector bodies across Buckinghamshire on issues affecting their community by place and type.
- Real influence over decisions that affect them.
- Better and more responsive services for their community through more informed decision-making based on needs of each local area.
- Easy and regular access to the elected Councillors by communities at the local level.
- Shared database to capture and track community issues.
- Councillors having an enhanced community leadership role.
- Enhanced confidence with, and reputation of, all Buckinghamshire Councils through more informed and engaged residents and communities.

6. Deliverables

6.1 **Increase in the number of people who feel they can influence decisions**
Increase in public satisfaction (at County and District level) by 1% per annum, as measured by the Local Area Agreement Target 37 and BVPI Public satisfaction Survey. County level baseline

is 31%[1] from 2006 Survey (Those that definitely agree and tend to agree to the question "Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?")

6.2 **Increase in the number of people who feel they have the opportunity to participate in local decision-making**
Increase in public satisfaction (at County and District level), as measured by the BVPI Public Satisfaction Survey. County level baseline is 29% from 2006 Survey (Those that are very satisfied or fairly satisfied in answering the question "Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the opportunities for participation in local decision-making provided by your Council?")

6.3 **Increase in the overall public satisfaction rating of all the Buckinghamshire Councils**
Increase in public satisfaction (at County and District level), as measured by the BVPI Public Satisfaction Survey on the percentage of citizens satisfied with the overall service provided by their Authority. Baselines for each Council is from the 2006 survey as follows:

Aylesbury Vale District Council – 53%   Buckinghamshire County Council – 55%
Chiltern District Council – 58%   South Bucks District Council – 56%
Wycombe District Council – 60%.

7. Timescales and key milestones

7.1 Within Project

Start date: July 2007   End date: March 2014

A developmental approach is being undertaken

2007/08 – Building firm foundations, based on community mapping including consultation Autumn 2007
2008/09 – Rationalisation and Implementation
2009/10 – Fuller Integration

See schedule, attached as Appendix 2, for detailed tasks.

7.2 Outside Project Influences

- Local Government and Public Involvement Bill
- Sustainable Communities Bill
- Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Improvement Partnership project on improving services through community engagement

8. Estimated costs

A detailed resource mapping exercise is currently being undertaken to identify the salary and operating costs of existing community engagement mechanisms. A sum of up to £10,000 has been sought to help with pump-priming costs on establishing a joint database if funding cannot be redirected from elsewhere.

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[1] Confidence factor ranges from + or – 2% to 6% of all percentages quoted in this section
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9. **Project Board**

Karen Satterford (Project Sponsor)   Aylesbury Vale District Council (Nigel Brooke)
Chiltern District Council (Gill Gowing)   Buckinghamshire County Council (Dean Taylor)
Wycombe District Council (Charles Meakings) South Bucks District Council (Rachael Winfield)

10. **Member involvement**

At this stage it is proposed to submit regular progress reports to the Joint Improvement Board. Member involvement will be addressed as part of the project's communications plan.

11. **Related projects / Work streams**

11.1 Issues raised through the community engagement process will be fed into appropriate work streams for service improvement consideration.

11.2 There is the opportunity to use the community engagement framework to consult and involve communities in Pathfinder work.

11.3 There is an opportunity to link with and learn from the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire (MKOB) Improvement project on improving services through community engagement will report in March 2008.

12. **Key Risks**

The specific risks for this work stream are as follows:

- Requires other Public Sector bodies to fully support and engage with this project, especially Police and Health.

- The flexibility and capacity of Pathfinder Councils to change and evolve their existing community engagement mechanisms.

- Failure to agreed common geographic (local) areas.

- The impact of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (when enacted).

- The Comprehensive Area Assessment from April 2009.

13. **Assumptions**

- Full participation by the participating County and District Councils at Member and officer level (Councillors, Community Development/Engagement Officers and appropriate service departments).

- The presumption is to use the existing building blocks of the GC2C model as outlined in the Pathfinder bid, with the precise arrangement depending on the circumstances and capacity of each District.

- Involvement of Town and Parish Councils as partners.

- Participation of individual residents and the appropriate communities and partners.

- £250,000 savings will be in the main non-cashable efficiency gains from improved ways of working.

Community Engagement   Appendix 1

Methods for empowering communities

1   Giving opportunities for communities to get involved and engaged in decisions that affect them in as simple and meaningful way as possible through a single streamlined joined-up approach across the Public Sector;

2   Strengthening the community leadership role of elected Councillors at the Parish, District and County levels with capacity for local decision making;

3   Ensuring Councils and other public sector bodies understand the needs and priorities of communities when forward-planning and in decision-making, based on a broad cross-section of views (the loud and quiet voices) and feeding back to communities on the outcome;

4   Using the views gained and identified needs to inform decisions on the performance and tailoring of services to those communities, thus giving more choice and responsive services and an increased level of public satisfaction;

5   Empowering communities to be more cohesive and self-sustaining by working together with the different people and cultures within Buckinghamshire to share one vision and build respect and neighbourliness; and

6   Increasing citizenship and empowering individuals to take greater personal responsibility for their own outcomes.