

DRAFT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2015-18



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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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

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

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

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.

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

TO BE AGREED