

**SOUTH DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**CONSULTATION AND COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

**2010-2015**

## 1. Background

- 1.1 The Council has a statutory duty to consult on various matters affecting the community. The Government is increasingly focusing on effective consultation and empowering the public. The new Duty to Involve came into force in April 2009. This new duty seeks to ensure that people have greater opportunities to have their say and aspires to embed a culture of engagement and empowerment in our public services.
- 1.2 The Duty to Involve is set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and was extended to include more public authorities in the most recent Empowerment White Paper 'Communities in Control'. This paper aims to give real control over local decisions and services to a wider pool of active citizens and introduces a new 'Duty to Promote Democracy' on local authorities, requiring them to encourage local people to get involved in politics. This includes new democratic and participatory tools such as; petitions, councillor call for action, extended scrutiny, participatory budgeting, community asset transfer and neighbourhood charters.
- 1.3 The Council must now consider as a matter of course the possible information provision, consultation and involvement opportunities that it needs to provide across all services.
- 1.4 The previous Corporate Consultation Strategy was approved in 2007 and provided an effective framework to complete consultation activities that enabled the ongoing development and improvement of services for the Community. Outcomes from this included improved external assessments in areas such as Use of Resources and Managing Performance, continued feedback to residents using the 'you said, we did' approach, development and review of the Council's Corporate Plan and support for internal assessments such as reaching 'achieving' status under the National Equality framework and being recognised as one of the best public sector places to work in under the Sunday Times listings.
- 1.5 Since then, there has been significant change in the approach for seeking the public's views, and a move from 'consultation' towards 'engagement'. For example, the Government's Big Society drive to empower communities means we will need to listen to the views of residents and be willing to devolve appropriate decision-making to residents. Furthermore, the Total Place initiative looks at a 'whole area' approach to public services and requires an expert understanding of the needs of residents, customers and citizens. This strategy has been refreshed to ensure that it recognises the changing environment.
- 1.6 This Consultation and Engagement Strategy will help the Council meet

it's duties by ensuring that all levels of community engagement are carried out in the most appropriate way with different methods of engagement used relevant to the activity and circumstances. The strategy will be refreshed on a regular and the Action Plan will be updated every year.

- 1.7 It is also important to note that this Strategy supports not only the Council's Corporate Plan and wider Sustainable Community Strategy for South Derbyshire it should also be read alongside the Council's Communication Strategy.

## **2.0 Purpose of the strategy**

- 2.1 This Consultation and Engagement Strategy aims to support strong, active and inclusive communities, who are informed and involved in decision-making and enable us to improve public services to enhance the quality of life across South Derbyshire.

## **3.0 Corporate context**

- 3.1 This strategy supports the Council's vision of: *making South Derbyshire a better place to live, work and visit*. It provides a focus for all engagement activities, policies and processes to align with all of the Council's key themes and in particular providing value for money.
- 3.2 The Council's Corporate Plan 2009 – 2014 highlights the importance of involving the Community and gives the following commitment to carry out 'effective consultation and communication with the community, business and other organisations.'
- 3.3 The outcome of implementing the Duty to Involve will be partly be measured by NI4 'the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality'.
- 3.4 In addition, the forthcoming Equality Act 2010 that is planned to merge over 20 pieces of equality legislation and covers Race, Age, Religion and Belief, Gender, Disability and Sexual Orientation further highlights the need for local authorities to consult and involve its service users in their decision-making processes. This places a heavy emphasis on the need for the Council to consult and demonstrate how we have engaged with different sections of the community, in particular seldom heard groups.

## **4.0 Why we engage**

4.1 Community engagement gives individuals, communities, business and partners a range of very important benefits:

- Members of the public can contribute to the realisation of the vision of the Strategic Partnership for the South Derbyshire area: *“A dynamic South Derbyshire, able to seize opportunities to develop successful communities, whilst respecting and enhancing the varied character and environment of our fast growing District.”* Local services are more tailored to local needs, which is central to the Total Place initiative.
- Developing a better understanding of and relationship with communities through genuine dialogue.
- Involving residents in public services and ensuring their knowledge, experience and priorities help us shape and improve our services.
- Encouraging more voluntary and community groups to become involved in planning and delivering local services.
- Helping people to establish an improved sense of neighbourhood and more cohesive communities.
- Engaging more people in local democracy.
- Ensure that the resources of the Council are directed to areas that are seen as important to the residents in the Community.
- Meeting the requirements to carry out statutory consultation.

## 5.0 Measuring Engagement

5.1 Satisfaction with the way the Council runs things was measured by the Best Value User Satisfaction Survey then every two years through the Place Survey. The Place Survey measures local people’s perceptions about the place they live based on the following national indicators:

NI 1: the % of people who believe that people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area.

NI 2: % of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood.

NI 3: Civic participation in a local area.

NI 4: % of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality.

5.2 The 2008 Place Survey results provided a national baseline showing the Council’s current performance in relation to community engagement is as follows:

- NI 1:78% residents said they believe that people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area.
- NI 2:60% of people who agreed that they belong to their neighbourhood.
- NI 3:14% of residents said that they had been involved in decisions affecting their local area.
- NI 4: 26% of residents said they can influence decisions in their local area
- 49% of residents said they were satisfied with the way the Council runs things.
- 32% of residents said they feel well informed about how to get involved in decision-making.

- 23% of residents said they would like to be more involved in the decisions that affect their local area.
- 64% said that whether they got involved or not would depend on the issue.
- 37% residents feel well informed about public services.

5.3 With the cancellation of the Place Survey we are not required to report against the National Indicators previously measured by the Survey. However, we will be exploring other options for undertaking a similar survey of our residents, as we still need to report against these measures for our key internal documents such as the Corporate Plan.

5.4 Engagement still remains a key priority of the Government but it is looking at shifting the power away from Whitehall and back to local authorities and communities.

## **6.0 What we mean by Community Engagement**

6.1 Communities can be:

- Communities of place - people within a defined geographical area such as a town, village, neighbourhood or housing estate.
- Communities of interest - people who share a particular experience, interest or characteristics, such as young people, faith groups, older people, disabled people, ethnic groups, or lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

6.2 Communities may define themselves and definitions of community do change. People often belong to more than one community and communities are nearly always very diverse.

6.3 Community Engagement can mean different things to different people, different communities and different services and situations. We have designed our Consultation and Engagement Strategy to ensure that we can provide the most appropriate means for communities and customers to be involved and to give feedback.

6.4 Based on David Wilcox's '*Guide to Effective Participation*' (see diagram below<sup>1</sup>), this involvement can vary from simply providing information on a particular subject, to asking for views or opinions on an issue or process, to actually involving members of the public and others in the decision making process itself.

6.5 The various means of community engagement are:

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Guide to Effective Participation by David Wilcox (1994)

- **Information** supports all types of community engagement and keeps people informed about such things as decisions, services and local events.
- **Consultation** can be used when there is a decision to make about something or when there are a number of choices about the details.
- **Deciding together.** This is when local people are involved in deciding which options to choose, but it is the Council that will act on the decisions.
- **Acting together.** This is when decisions are made by partnerships between local people or agencies and the Council. The people involved in making the decisions also take part in carrying them out.
- **Supporting independent community initiatives.** This is when independent groups get help to develop and carry out their own plans.

DEGREE OF INVOLVEMENT				
LOW				HIGH
<b>Information</b> You tell people what is planned so that they are informed about what is happening.	<b>Consultation</b> You provide information and use the feedback to inform the subsequent decision	<b>Deciding together</b> You encourage people to provide some additional ideas and options, and to decide with you the best way forward.	<b>Acting together</b> Not only do different interests decide together what is best, but also they form a partnership to carry it out.	<b>Supporting others</b> You help others do what they want - perhaps within a framework of grants, advice and support provided by the resource holder

6.6 A high level of involvement is not necessarily better than a low level of involvement and each level of activity is valuable in its own right. The Council will use the appropriate level of involvement to meet the needs of each situation and will always define an appropriate level of consultation at the outset of each consultation exercise

## 7.0 Principles and Standards

7.1 The Council is a member of the Derbyshire Community Engagement Group (DCEG), which brings together public sector organisations in Derbyshire that, engage the public. We will work to the principles and standards outlined by DCEG to ensure that we support the continuous improvement of public services through effective engagement with users and potential users are services.

7.2 As a Council we will work to the following standards to ensure robust methods of community engagement are adhered to:

**Clarity of purpose** - before beginning any engagement activity, we will be clear about why it is happening, 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.

**Timing** - we will allow sufficient time to design and carry out engagement activities. We will also allow sufficient time to ensure that the results of the engagement activities can shape our policies, plans and services to meet the needs of our communities.

**Evidence base** - we will use 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.

**Efficient** - we will use utilise existing structures, forums and groups to make the most efficient use of resources and to build on existing contacts and networks.

**Quality** - we will work to ensure that staff 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.

**Communication** - we will always be open, transparent, honest and accountable when sharing information and responding to contributions from all participants. We will communicate the appropriate level of information to the community so that they are informed of the process and how they can get involved.

**Partnership working** - we will build on and strengthen our approach to joint working by encouraging further collaboration and partnership working, with particular recognition of the knowledge and expertise of the voluntary and community sector. This will include promoting opportunities for shared communications and consultation activities where appropriate.

**Inclusion** - we will use a mixture of appropriate methods tailored to different audiences to reach as wide a range of stakeholders as possible, including those communities defined as 'seldom heard'. We will recognise the complexity of engaging with seldom-heard groups and understand the additional barriers to engagement, such as accessibility, language and transport issues.

**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.

**Monitoring and 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 chose to, particularly those whose voices are often 'seldom heard', and change our practices accordingly. We will evaluate effectiveness and share learning internally and with our partners.

## **8.0 Framework for coordination**

- 8.1 The Council working alongside our partners will co-ordinate its consultation programme effectively in order to avoid consultation duplication and to ensure the best use of the resources.
- 8.2 **Consultation and Engagement Strategy** – this sets out the framework for public and service user consultation and engagement and includes an annual action plan.
- 8.3 **Consultation Toolkit** – the Consultation and Engagement Strategy is complemented by a comprehensive Consultation Toolkit, which contains guidance, technical advice and key actions for those undertaking consultation.
- 8.4 **Corporate Consultation Officer (Policy)** – will produce an overall consultation programme and manage key corporate consultation activities such as the Citizens’ Panel, Place Survey and provide support to all services of the Council with their consultation activities.
- 8.5 **Derbyshire Consultation and Engagement Group (DCEG)** – the Derbyshire Community Engagement Group brings together public sector organisations in Derbyshire that engage the public. We look for opportunities to work jointly to share best practice and resources and to produce a joint consultation programme.
- 8.6 **Consultation calendar** – The calendar on our website is a key tool for co-ordinating our activities and was developed to increase awareness, minimise duplication, and promote joint consultation where appropriate and practical. We will continue to promote its effective use so that it can be the prime source of information when planning a consultation to ensure good practice and avoid duplication of effort.

## **9.0 Key mechanisms for implementing Community Engagement**

- 9.1 The Citizens’ Panel is a mechanism for residents of South Derbyshire to regularly give their opinions and comments on a range of Council issues. At least twice a year we send out a questionnaire to a thousand residents who have agreed to give their views on a variety of topics that the Council is consulting on.
- 9.2 The Council works with South Derbyshire Partnership (SDP) to make sure “communities are vibrant and there is a strong sense of community”. Through the SDP we work to improve consultation methods so that all groups can participate.
- 9.3 Six area forums are held quarterly across the District so that residents can get involved in the decision-making process and receive information about our services.

- 9.4 The South Derbyshire Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) highlights the Council's guiding principals to encourage people to become involved in the planning process.
- 9.5 Public Relations and communications play an important role in community engagement and ensures that residents are kept up to date with services and are informed about all Council consultations and community engagement events. The Communications Strategy (2010-2015) ensures that a coordinated and strategic approach is given to all communications and consultations activity.
- 9.6 The Council's Constitution describes our mechanism for considering and responding to petitions as a means of engaging more meaningfully with local communities, enabling the public to let us know about their concerns and as a mechanism for generating service improvements.
- 9.7 Tenant participation encourages and supports all tenants and residents to become more involved with the services the Council provides for them. The service works with tenants and residents to find the best forms of participation for particular service issues using a variety of methods and techniques.
- 9.8 The Council's Values and Attitudes Forum consists of representatives from across the communities of South Derbyshire. The forum meets bi-monthly and provides the Council with an external reference and peer challenge for reviewing and discussing aspects relating to equality and diversion and social inclusion.

## **10.0 Responsibilities**

- 10.1 Information about community engagement will be coordinated by Organisational Development. The purpose of this will be to establish the nature and purpose of the activity, identify the corporate resources required and the extent of involvement. This will also reveal how the activity fits within the Councils and partners programme of consultation so that areas of duplication/cross-over can be identified and joint working proposed. This will help the Council to streamline its consultation activity and to avoid consultation fatigue, which occurs when the same people are consulted time and time again.
- 10.2 In practice, this will mean that all service areas will identify the key pieces of consultation they will undertake in the next financial year as part of the service planning process. The Policy Officer (Consultation) will compile an annual plan of proposed consultation activity. Using this information, a timetable of key consultations for each year (i.e. the consultation calendar) will be made available on the Council's website. This will ensure that an overview of the complete range of the Council's community engagement activity will be easily accessible to the public, the Council's partners, Members and Officers.

- 10.3 **Members** – as representatives of their constituents, have a key community leadership role. We will continue to support this role through our Area Forums. The Finance and Management Committee will receive the annual report on the outcomes from the Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy.
- 10.4 **Service areas** – are responsible for identifying consultation activity planned and any gaps in consultation activity that will need to be undertaken in future years for inclusion in each Service Plan.
- 10.5 **Managers**-are responsible for defining the consultation activity to be undertaken, receiving the outcomes and determining the service improvements or changes that maybe required. Support being provided by the Policy Officer (Consultation).
- 10.6 **Policy Officer (Consultation)** – is responsible for producing an annual consultation plan and project managing corporate consultation activities including the Citizens' Panel, national surveys as required, supporting Council and other service consultation activity and internal employee survey. Working with the Communications Team on measures to evaluate the success of the communication campaigns. Producing the key messages from the Citizens' Panel to form a report for senior managers and the Finance and Management Committee and ensuring results are shared internally and externally and results are acted upon.
- 10.7 **Partners** – to co-ordinate consultation and look for opportunities for joint working. Sharing knowledge of different groups of stakeholders and locality issues and sharing best practice. We are committed to working in innovative partnerships to deliver benefits to local communities. The partnership between the Council and Northgate Public Services will ensure greater resources in the area of community engagement and more opportunities to access new technology, which will generate higher degrees of informed public participation from individuals and communities.

## 11.0 Inclusion and engagement

- 11.1 The range of groups with which the Council might consult is extensive. It includes service users, potential service users, interest groups, partners, business, other public service providers, Elected Members, employees and industry and other stakeholders.
- 11.2 It is important to ensure that consultation is inclusive and recognises that some people may be less accessible to consult with than others, 'seldom heard', e.g. young people in care, adults with learning disabilities or ethnic minorities.
- 11.3 We will use a variety of different methods to ensure that the people of South Derbyshire have an opportunity to have their say and to ensure that different voices are heard. There are various mechanisms through

which individuals and groups can engage with and help to influence services provided by the Council and other public services, for example, Youth Councils, the new Local Involvement Network (LINK), service-user involvement mechanisms, Values and Attitudes Forum etc. We will adapt and develop forums in line with community wishes and business needs.

## **12.0 Sharing results**

- 12.1 Providing feedback is vital both internally and externally. Feedback can help strengthen the credibility of consultation work and also helps to ensure that respondents feel valued in the process, and builds a trusting relationship, increasing the likelihood that consultees will respond to future exercises.
- 12.2 Internally the results will be shared on the consultation Intranet pages and via the staff magazine, better (where appropriate), to ensure that all staff involved in consultation are able to learn from each other and share best practice. Key messages will also be reported on an annual basis to the Finance and Management Committee.
- 12.3 Externally, it is important to be specific from the outset about the potential audiences who need to know the results and use an appropriate mechanism to provide feedback. We will be open and honest when sharing results and make clear links to actions taken as a result of public feedback, which have led to policy development and service improvement. Results and outcomes will be posted on the Council's website and will be communicated through local media.

## **13.0 Review of Strategy**

This Strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis and take into account any national, regional or local requirements. It is evident that the Government will continue to empower local communities and the need to have effective and thorough methods for obtaining views and options will come more into focus.