

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET MEMBER

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.2 To ask the Cabinet Member to approve the Community Engagement Plan.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Council is committed to involving local people in its most important decisions through community engagement.
- 2.2 The Places Scrutiny Panel undertook a review of community engagement activity by the Council. The review started in October 2012 and the Panel issued its report in April 2013.
- 2.3 The Scrutiny Panel's report contained 13 detailed recommendations. An action plan has now been prepared to deal with these.
- 2.4 The action plan was positively received by the Places Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on the 23rd of September 2013 and was approved by Cabinet on the 24 September 2013.
- 2.5 Key to fulfilling the action plan and the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations is for the Council to adopt a Community Engagement Plan which addresses the need for a more effective, coordinated, one Council approach to community engagement. Encouraging higher levels of participation, leading to more informed decision-making on issues that are important to local people.
- 2.6 The plan aims to:
- make the council's commitment to engagement clear
 - provide guidelines and principles that all services will consider and adhere to when engaging with local residents
 - define why the council engages
 - outline in what circumstances the council will engage with local residents
- 2.7 The Community Engagement Plan at Appendix 1 has been developed in accordance with the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations and is accordingly presented to the Cabinet Member for approval.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 The Cabinet Member approves the Community Engagement Plan.
- 3.2 The Cabinet Member does not approve the Community Engagement Plan.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 The Cabinet Member approves the Community Engagement Plan thereby ensuring the Council, in response to the Places Scrutiny Panel's report, has in place measures to ensure it adopts a more effective, coordinated and one council approach to community engagement.
- 4.2 The Cabinet Member does not approve the Community Engagement Plan leaving many of the recommendations identified by the Places Scrutiny Panel unaddressed.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

- 5.1 There may be some minimal financial and staffing implications when the recommendations are implemented. This will be monitored.

6. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

- 6.1 An integrated impact assessment has been carried out and the issues raised therein have been used to shape the Community Engagement Plan.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DECLARED

- 7.1 The Community Engagement Plan has been the subject of extensive officer consultation and has been formulated to address the recommendations made by the Places Scrutiny Panel arising from its seven month review in to the area.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 The Cabinet Member is invited to accept this report and approve the Community Engagement Plan.

DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND RESOURCES

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report - Places Scrutiny
Panel Report on Community Engagement

North Lincolnshire Council

Community Engagement Plan

2013/14

1. Introduction

1.1 The council has a statutory obligation under the Duty to Involve, introduced in April 2009, to consult and involve individuals, groups, businesses or organisations likely to be affected by their actions. Although superseded by the Best Value Statutory Guidance, the Duty has yet to be repealed. This plan aims to:

- make the council's **commitment** to engagement clear
- provide **guidelines and principles** that all services will consider and adhere to when engaging with local residents
- define **why** the council engages
- outline **in what circumstances** the council will engage with local residents

1.2 The plan highlights the need for:

- A Councilwide calendar of key consultations;
- These key consultations would be based on taking a view of the Council's priorities;
- A monthly update of the calendar to take into account consultations that arise to short timescales;
- A business case template that allows Services to assess the need for consultations;
- The Council to use its customer insight expertise to ensure that a representative sample of those affected participate with the long term aim of using statistical techniques in our sampling;
- Services to amalgamate or join up consultations where possible;
- The use of one, corporately approved, software package for online consultations; and
- A follow up review of consultation activity.

1.3 It sets out the council's commitment to involving local people in its most important decisions through community engagement and sets out how it will do this through:

- Seeking opportunities to get local people involved in the running of council services and assets;
- Using Customer Insight techniques to find the best way for the Council to engage with local people, designing engagement activities in ways that enable the people effected by the issue to get involved;
- Using the four stages of engagement outlined in this plan for all engagement activity – design, deliver, evaluate, feedback;

- Where the options being consulted on may inform the making of a key decision¹, formal approval to the consultation exercise should first be obtained; and
- Not consulting on decisions already made or changes already agreed.

1.4 This document does not detail exactly how engagement should be delivered but instead provides a set of guidelines and principles to assist council services in effectively involving local people in decision making. All engagement activity undertaken by the council will adhere to the following **principles**:

- Use all information gathered to evaluate the different needs of all communities for future work;
- Consider barriers to involvement and find ways to overcome these;
- Be tailored to ensure a representative sample of people affected by the issue can participate;
- Consider the needs of both rural and urban communities;
- Find ways to engage communities of place, identity and interest – where appropriate;
- Use the right methods for the task at hand; and
- Be designed, delivered, evaluated and fed back.

¹ As defined in the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

2. What is a community?

A **community** is made up of individuals who identify with others to form an identifiable group. This can include people who live or work in a geographical area or people who have the same interests but also to disadvantaged communities usually identified as those with less opportunities than others due to age, sexual orientation, ethnic or cultural background, disability or social background.

- 2.1 It is important not to lose sight that communities are made up of individuals whose individual opinions may be influenced by the community they belong to but may differ from other people in their community as they belong to more than one community.
- 2.2 Even within communities of place people may live in one geographic area and work/study in another. Similarly, people may belong to more than one community of interest. As such, it should never be assumed that one person can encompass the views of everyone in the community they represent.
- 2.3 It is also necessary to recognise that there are some communities who, in the past, have experienced social exclusion. These are often referred to as 'hard to reach' groups. These groups often require more specific or alternative methods of engagement.
- 2.4 The council believes that everyone in North Lincolnshire has a right to be involved and engaged in the way that the council operates and is keen to make sure that, within reason, all necessary steps are taken to remove barriers and widen involvement of all groups.

3. What is community engagement and why is it important?

Community engagement is a catch-all term for interaction between the council and local residents, usually to enable communities to influence services and decisions. Community engagement takes many forms, from simply informing local people to getting them involved in the running of services.

3.1 **When we will engage:** the council will undertake community engagement in order to:

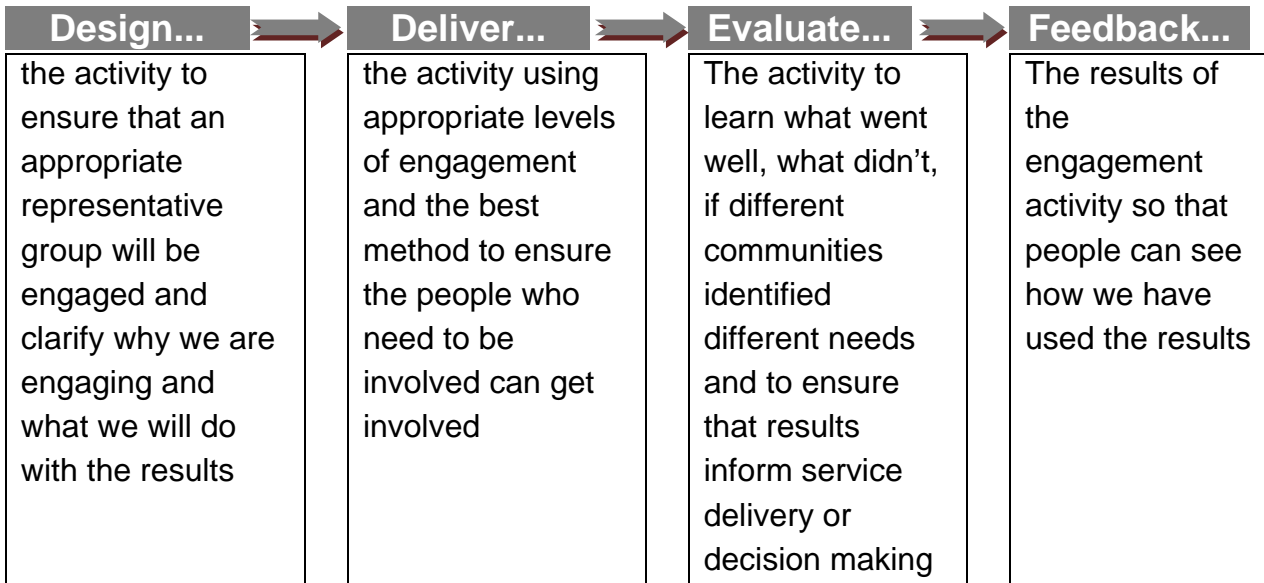
Involve local people in decision-making or service design	Inform local people of decisions that affect them	Encourage people to be involved in their local community	Get local people involved in the running of services or assets
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3.2 **How we will engage:** the council will adopt a hub and spoke approach to engagement with the corporate centre providing coordination and support with services being responsible for their engagement activities.

3.3 The council engages with local people in the course of its day-to-day business. The council will endeavour to carry out its engagement intelligently and at the right time. We will engage people in the most appropriate way using plain language and only asking easily understood questions that can be analysed properly and influence decisions before they have been made. There are four broad levels of engagement:

Inform	Consult	Involve	Empower
This could include information provided on the council’s website about decisions that have been taken e.g. minutes of council meetings	This could include surveys undertaken to ask local people their views on key decisions or proposed changes to services	This could include meetings that bring local service providers and community representatives together to solve local problems e.g. Neighbourhood Action Teams (NATs)	This could include the transfer of council buildings to community groups or a community taking responsibility for delivering services traditionally delivered by the Council

3.4 Engagement should not be rushed and take place before a decision is made. Services need to make sure that they have enough time and the resources to carry out the following:



- 3.5 Customer insight techniques and diversity monitoring are proven ways of ensuring that participation in activity is appropriate and representative of those affected by decisions influenced by community engagement.
- 3.6 In addition, our community engagement activity, particularly consultations, need to be statistically relevant if the results of activity can truly reflect the thoughts of the people who live in North Lincolnshire. In the long term the council aims to use statistical techniques in our sampling to compliment customer insight and diversity monitoring information.
- 3.7 The council recognises that Elected Members have an important part to play in engaging with the community and need to be involved in the planning of any engagement work and be kept informed of any progress.
- 3.8 In most cases engagement is carried out by council staff as part of or in addition to their day job. The council aims to identify and provide appropriate training² for its staff and, where possible, develop dedicated engagement staff within each service to ensure that any engagement is as effective as possible.
- 3.9 Community engagement is an essential tool for helping to deliver the council Strategy 2013-17. The council strategy demonstrates a commitment to full community empowerment.
- 3.10 Specific information on consultation can be found in Appendix 1. Further information can be found in the council's Consultation and Engagement Guide and Quick Guide to Community Engagement.

² Any training would also be made available to Elected Members

4. Responsibilities

What we will do	How we will do it	Responsibility
1 We will plan and coordinate consultation activity in advance to reduce inefficiency and duplication	✓ Each service consultation lead will provide a list of consultation exercises for the following year, with priorities identified. Statutory and priority consultation exercises will be flagged within the calendar	Services
	✓ A calendar of planned consultation activity will be maintained	Stronger Communities Team
	✓ We will identify where additional resource for delivery is required and plan fieldwork	Stronger Communities Team
	✓ We will identify unnecessary or duplicated consultation exercises	Communications Team
2 We will only consult where it is necessary to either (a) inform a decision, (b) fill a gap in intelligence or (c) meet a statutory requirement	✓ A standard business case form will be completed for all consultation exercises	Services
	✓ A summary of the objectives of each planned consultation exercise will be included with the calendar of planned consultation exercises	Stronger Communities Team
	✓ Services will challenge the objectives of planned consultation exercises to ensure that only necessary consultation takes place	Services
	✓ We will not put resources (either in design or delivery phases) into consultation exercises without clear objectives	Services
	✓ We will re-focus resources to deliver less consultations but on a larger scale and with a greater degree of planning	Services
3 We will use clear and consistent research standards in the design and delivery of consultation	✓ We will produce a consultation toolkit to provide guidance for services designing consultation exercises	Stronger Communities Team
	✓ We will produce a series of guides on specific methods of consultation for services designing consultation exercises (e.g. focus groups, questionnaires)	Stronger Communities Team
	✓ We will provide consultancy for priority projects on design and delivery to help services produce sound intelligence from consultation	Stronger Communities Team
	✓ Consultation exercises will be designed in a way that enables results to be analysed	Services

What we will do	How we will do it	Responsibility
4 We will make every effort to consult with a representative sample of the population, or with the target group where there is one	✓ We will use the right methods to deliver consultation to (a) reach our target audience and (b) meet the objectives of the consultation	Services
	✓ We will use customer insight and diversity monitoring to help us reach our target audience and to monitor whether we have reached our target audience or not	Services
	✓ We will capture postcode information from consultees to help us monitor how representative consultation responses are	Services
	✓ We will use Stronger Communities Team fieldworkers to deliver face-to-face consultation for priority projects, where appropriate	Stronger Communities Team
5 We will monitor and review the effectiveness and quality of consultation	✓ We will record the results of consultation and report on what has changed as a result	Services
	✓ We will undertake an annual review of consultation activity and produce a summary report	Communications Team
	✓ We will monitor response rates of consultation exercises and monitor how well we are reaching a representative sample of the population	Stronger Communities Team
	✓ We will review the plan against current best practice	Stronger Communities Team
	✓ We will quality check all surveys against communications standards	Communications Team
6 We will use one system for online consultation and ensure that all consultation is available online	✓ We will promote the use of the corporate approved software for online consultation	Services
	✓ We will ensure that the links to the surveys are checked on a daily basis	Services
	✓ We will ensure that only live surveys are promoted on the council's website	Services
	✓ We will enter the results of face-to-face consultation online	Stronger Communities Team
	✓ We will keep the license for the corporate approved software under review and consider alternatives where it is cost effective to do so	Communications Team
	✓ We will monitor use of other online consultation tools by services and enforce compliance	Services

5. Action plan

Action	Lead	End
1 Develop template for planned consultation calendar and business case template for proposed activity	Stronger Communities Team	Oct 2013
2 Promote uEngage as the standard tool for online consultation	Services	Nov 2013
3 Develop consultation toolkit and specific guides for consultation methods	Stronger Communities Team	Nov 2013
4 Consult with Directorate consultation leads to produce list of upcoming consultations for 3rd quarter of 2013/14	Stronger Communities Team	Nov 2013
5 Identify priorities within the calendar of planned consultations and identify where additional support will be provided by Stronger Communities Team	Communications Team	Dec 2013
6 Agree final calendar of planned consultations for 3rd quarter of 2013/14	Communications Team	Dec 2013
7 Review options for online consultation	Communications Team	Dec 2013
8 Undertake review of consultation activity over 2013/14	Communications Team	Apr 2014

Appendix 1: The principles of consultation

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This section sets out the plan for improving consultation activity across the council by introducing a single, coordinated approach. It will be reviewed annually in line with the council's Communications Plan. An action plan for implementing improvements is included at page 9.

2. Aims

- 2.1. Consultation with local residents helps inform decision making and provides intelligence that can help to shape local services. It is also a key tool in helping the council deliver against its priorities to achieve *excellence in customer service* and to *make our communities safer and stronger*.
- 2.2. This plan sets out how a single, coordinated approach to consultation can be implemented. This approach will deliver the following benefits:
- **Consistency in standards** by managing consultation under a single corporate process
 - **Better intelligence to inform decision making** by improving the quality of consultation activity and by focusing it on priorities
 - **Transparency for residents and for the organisation** by reviewing and reporting the results of consultation
 - **Improved efficiency** by planning and coordinating consultation activities, focusing resources on priority consultations and reducing duplication

3. Approach

3.1. Coordination

- 3.1.1. Consultation across the council will be managed using a calendar of planned activities. Each service will provide a list of upcoming consultations for the following year using a standard template to record key information about the activity. A suggested template is included in Appendix 2.
- 3.1.2. *The Communications Team* will have oversight of all planned consultations. This will enable priority consultations to be highlighted. Priority consultations can be given further support in the design of the exercise by the *Stronger Communities Team* in conjunction with the council's *Customer Insight Officer*. In addition, it may be identified that additional fieldwork should be provided by the *Stronger Communities Team*. The level of support provided will be proportionate to the scale of the activity and its level of priority.
- 3.1.3. The calendar of planned consultations will also be used to encourage services to deliver less small scale surveys that do not provide good intelligence or inform decision making. Duplication will also be identified with the overall aim of reducing the number of consultations carried out, but improving the quality of those that are.

3.2. Review and Improvement

3.2.1. Consultation activity will be reviewed annually. The purpose of the review will be to evaluate how well each consultation exercise met its planned objectives. For example:

- Did the consultation reach its target groups?
- What changed as a result of the consultation?
- Was the consultation designed and delivered using robust research standards?

3.2.2. The review will aim to provide a comprehensive assessment of how well the council is delivering consultation as a whole as well as identifying what has and what hasn't worked well. The review will be used to guide how services should be supported and advised in carrying out consultation activity over the following year.

3.3. *Quality*

3.3.1. A concise business case will be provided by services for all consultation exercises. This must identify the objectives of the consultation and show why it is needed. The business case for each consultation will be recorded through the list of planned consultations.

3.3.2. Advice and guidance on specific consultation methods will be made available to all services through a range of guides. All consultation exercises are expected to apply appropriate research standards to ensure that the results are robust and reliable. In order to encourage as many people as possible to take part in the consultation, all consultations should be:

- Realistic in their objectives
- Exact in nature
- Short
- Precise, clear and easy to answer in its questions
- Open to all (unless there is a specific reason not to be)
- Neutral, with no leading or loaded questions
- Simple to complete
- Exclusive to the issue you wish to consult on

3.3.3. The *Stronger Communities Team* will monitor the use of appropriate research standards and provide support and guidance for services where necessary. This will include encouraging services to use the right consultation methods for the groups they wish to consult with.

3.3.4. Improvements in the quality of recent consultations have shown an increase in participation. It is hoped that by adopting this plan the number of people participating in activity will increase to a level where the council can use statistical techniques to sample responses to ensure that the results reflect the people who are affected by any decisions the activity influences.

- 3.3.5. All council surveys must be delivered online, using the corporate approved software³. Other methods should also be considered to ensure that consultations are inclusive, response rates are appropriate and that the target group is reached. Where surveys are also delivered using other methods, the results must be entered online onto the corporate approved software. This will enable the results to be captured and analysis to be undertaken.
- 3.3.6. All surveys must include capturing of postcode and diversity monitoring information. This will enable customer insight analysis to be undertaken to identify groups not participating in consultation exercises.
- 3.3.7. From this information we can re-visit some groups to ensure that a relative cross-section of people have taken part in any consultation from any given area.
- 3.3.8. To ensure that decisions are intelligence led with a broad base of evidence they should not be based purely on consultations. They should embrace customer insight techniques and take into account other information such as community knowledge, service data, staff knowledge and other customer feedback.

³ At the time of writing the corporate approved software is under review. Please contact the Stronger Communities Team for confirmation of the results of the review.

Appendix 2: Extract from another authorities website



The Consultation Annual Plan lists planned consultations and engagement activities to be carried out by the Council and its partners.

Want more information? – click the ID number and it will link to the Be Heard consultation database which will provide you with further details of the consultation.

Want to see if you can participate in consultation? Contact details of the lead organisation can be found in the plan next to the consultation.

Further information on all consultations can be found on the council's database at www.xxxxxxxx.gov.uk. You will also find information about past consultations and what has happened as a result.

If you have any queries about the consultations please contact the lead person. Contact details of the lead person can be found in the plan and on the Be Heard Database.

GRAND TOTAL OF CONSULTATIONS	29
Date	01/04/2012 – 31/03/2013
Report produced by	Systems Administrator



Lead Organisation: Council
Service/Section: Children, Young People and Families

Total number of consultations		3	
Con ID	1417		
Title	Consultation and interviews for Service Director – Children, Young People and Families		
Overview	Young People from the Youth Parliament and the Children in Care Council attended a training workshop to introduce them to interview techniques, explore the role of Service Director and ascertain what characteristics they would like the appointed post holder to bring to the role. Young People formed a youth panel in which they set questions for interview, were supported in interviewing applicants and were able to input their views and make recommendations as to which applicant should be appointed.		
Contact Name	Lisa Carter	Date	03/04/2012 – 17/04/2012
Area	Authority wide		
Method	Inviting comments:	event, Meeting – series,	Specific Techniques: Panel