

South Lakeland District Council Consultation Strategy

Contents

Section 1: Introduction.....	2
Section 2: The need to consult.....	3
Section 3: How we will improve consultation.....	4
3.1 Consultation principles.....	4
3.2 Guidance on how to consult.....	6
3.3 Consultation roles and responsibilities.....	7
3.4 Consultation and Community Engagement Database	7
3.5 Annual Consultation Programme	8
3.6 Support, training and awareness raising.....	8
Section 4: Key actions.....	9
Consultation Strategy documentation: Appendices list.....	9



Section 1: Introduction

In the last few years there has been a significant amount of consultation work going on in South Lakeland. However the quality of that work has been uneven and there has been a lack of a strategic approach or systematic co-ordination of activity. Some engagement mechanisms have traditionally been seen or used as a way to discharge a requirement to engage.

The Council and its key partners have recognised the need to undergo cultural change to address the increasing demands of communities and citizens and is now proactively working towards being more responsive to those community needs with some real achievements being realised through consultation:

- Through youth involvement and community consultation 5 multi-use games areas have been developed in South Lakeland, resulting in a significant drop in anti-social behaviour.
- The consultation phase of Local Area Partnership (LAP) establishment has led to the establishment of partnerships that bring influence and decision making closer to the communities within them.
- The emerging action plans for the LAPs are informed by each areas' community-led plans and the extensive consultation and involvement that went into them.
- The Talk Toilets consultation is involving communities in the delivery of a valued service in a way that reflects local need and capacity.

These changes illustrate that a cultural shift towards more inclusive working is happening as a result of work that has been put in place.

In fact the Council approved a Community Engagement Strategy in 2007 with a Vision that:-

“People in South Lakeland are able to help shape the services they receive and are more involved in the democratic life of their community”.

That Strategy set out a clear imperative to improve the way communities in South Lakeland are involved in shaping the services they receive and in how people can contribute to decision-making. The Strategy sought to address these issues through a number of outcomes to ensure our Services, our Corporate Plan and Budget are based on a programme of open consultation. It was subsequently determined that the outcomes would be achieved through transformation projects, namely the Community Intelligence Project and the Locality Working Project.

The Community Intelligence Project is the practical method which will ensure improving community intelligence through understanding our communities, engaging with communities through a variety of mechanisms and capturing information on needs to ensure our services can respond effectively.

The Project is providing significant benefits to the way we engage with our communities, how intelligence is used, our methods of operation and how we support

and sustain that work. The Council has acknowledged the importance of this through the appointment of a dedicated Community Engagement Officer. A key action in the project is to develop, produce and embed a Consultation Strategy accompanied by an Annual Consultation Programme.

Since April 2009, as part of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, all councils have a duty to 'inform, consult and engage' local communities in everything that they do. The Council's shared vision set out in its Corporate Plan highlights this duty.

“By involving people and creating opportunities we will make South Lakeland the best place to live, work and visit.” SLDC Corporate Plan 2010 – 2013

This Strategy focuses on the actions we will take to improve how we undertake consultations which inform what we do.

Section 2: The need to consult

Effective consultation with customers generates invaluable information, insights and learning that we can use to shape services in accordance with customers' needs. While consultation often produces differing points of view and conflicting opinions, this should not be seen as a reason to avoid engagement with customers. It simply underlines the need to ensure that we carry out our consultation work according to agreed principles, using proven methods and that we exercise transparent and accountable judgement to provide leadership as to the most appropriate way forward.

When we use the term consultation we mean:

A process in which the views of citizens, partners and external customers are sought about a particular issue or service undertaken by the council and due consideration is given to these in coming to a decision.

This covers a wide range of quantitative and qualitative methods, including face-to-face, postal and on-line questionnaires, telephone surveys, focus groups, workshops, public meetings and so on.

Consultation is part of a wider process of community engagement, which the Department of Communities and Local Government defines as 'the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest or similar situations to address issues affecting the well being of those people.'

To ensure that the Council provides the services that people want in the way they want them. Consultation is used to:

- Involve users in making decisions about priorities, policies, projects, and strategies (which in turn stimulates the local democratic process)
- Target services more closely by providing what people say they need and want
- Monitor user satisfaction with services over time

- Improve the quality of services
- Improve the take up of services
- Address issues arising from proposed changes to services.

The Councils approach to consultation should ensure that:

- A system of co-ordination exists between individual service areas and centrally including management teams
- A consistent approach to consultation is adopted across the council
- All consultations are carried out to a high standard
- The information collected from consultations is used to best effect
- Consultations link closely to the Strategic Planning and Performance Management Framework
- All consultations link to corporate priorities as set out in the corporate plan and service plan
- The Cumbria Community Engagement Standards are embedded and reviewed within consultations.

While the principles laid out in this strategy apply to all SLDC council services the planning and development control have their own legally prescribed approaches. The planning and development control service's approach is described in their Statement of Community Involvement which was developed for the South Lakeland Development Framework and adopted in September 2006.

Section 3: How we will improve consultation

3.1 Consultation principles

In order to improve The Council will adopt the following principles accord with the Government's Code of Practice on Consultation. We will evaluate our effectiveness in adhering to these principles by applying the county standards as part of our consultation good practice (Details in How to Guide).

We will be clear about the purpose and scope of each consultation exercise we undertake

Specific and focused consultation should take place while proposals are at a formative stage. We will be clear about the scope of the consultation, what issues we are to consult about, the time-scale for the process and how the results of the consultation will be used.

Meets Community Engagement Standard: 3 - planning.

We will give clear information

For each specific consultation exercise we will make sure information is provided about the background to the issue being discussed. Information will be presented in plain language and in formats that meet the differing needs of the consultees.

Meets Community Engagement Standards: 5 - working together, 6 - sharing information and 7 - working with others.

When we begin a consultation exercise we explain the purpose, scope and parameters of the exercise, including:

- why we are consulting
- what we are consulting about
- who we are consulting with
- the options available
- the decision making process
- how the views given will be used to inform this
- how feedback will be given to consultees on the findings and actions/decision
- the name and contact number for the person managing the consultation.

Meets Community Engagement Standards: 1 - Involvement, 4 - methods, 7 - working with others and 9 - feedback.

Sufficient time will be allowed for consultees to respond

Consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible e.g. over the Christmas break. We will ensure consultations are planned in advance through our Annual Consultation Programme – and allow enough time for people to be informed about the issue and /or seek a representative organisational view, this is especially important for partners, community and voluntary groups and Parishes.

Meets Community Engagement Standard: 3 - planning.

We will consult people in different ways, taking account of the different communities in the district

We recognise the need to talk to different groups within the city about the best way of reaching their communities. We will make particular efforts through, for example, contact with voluntary and community groups, to reach people often excluded from our decision-making, such as racial minority groups and young people as specified in the Cumbria Compact. This may involve providing accessible venues, information in alternative formats, childcare, support for carers, training and, where appropriate, the payment of expenses to enable groups to be involved.

Meets Community Engagement Standards: 2 - support, 4 - methods, 7 - working with others and 8 - improvement.

We will give feedback on the results of consultation exercises we undertake and, where required, explain the reasons why a particular decision has been made, or direction chosen.

At the end of every consultation exercise we will produce a report summarising the views that have been expressed and what has happened as a result of the consultation. This will be published on our internet site, in the consultation database and made available to people who have taken part in the exercise.

Meets Community Engagement Standards: 9 - feedback and 10 - monitoring and evaluation.

Action 1: The Council to adopt these consultation principles and apply the Cumbria Community Engagement Standards

3.2 Guidance on how to consult

For consultation exercises, the lead officers should discuss the approach they intend to take with the Community Engagement Officer and provide information for each consultation before it takes place as set out in the Consultation Toolkit based on the following requirements:

- Ensuring your consultation is fit for purpose
- External consultation providers and procurement process
- Councillors and consultations
- Reason for consultation
- Timescales and planning
- Project management including LEAP
- Who should you consult? –Cumbria Compact requirements includes community, voluntary and equality groups. Parish Charter requirements.
- Equality monitoring
- Methods for consultation including: focus groups, questionnaires, citizens panel, public meetings, sampling and analysis.
- Reporting the findings of the consultation
- Service changes: impact, benefits and monitoring
- Feedback to consultation participants and the public
- Statutory requirements:
 - Freedom of information
 - Data Protection.
- Consultation process Guide (with checklist)
- Consultation Planning Template and guidance

- Cumbria Community Engagement Standards and self assessment guidance

Detailed guidance available in Consultation Toolkit, appendix 1. This guidance will become the Consultation section in the Community Engagement Toolkit

Action 2: Approve Consultation Toolkit

3.3 Consultation roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Assistant Directors	Identify topics of consultation through service plan development
Lead Officers	Contact officer with responsibility for delivering the consultation
Community Engagement Officer	Provides support with consultation and engagement, will be lead officer for some corporate consultations. Also Parish Liaison Officer – can provide parish contacts and liaison
Information Unit	Provides support for consultations where data is required and will receive results of consultations. Maybe able to support with different formats and comparisons for results
Communications	Can provide advice and support with interfacing with the public, through press releases, social media and the website on consultation awareness and the release of results and reports.
Equality Officer	Can provide advice and guidance on equality issues and Equality Impact Assessments

3.4 Consultation and Community Engagement Database

The Consultation and Community Engagement Database is a new web based system. It will be accessed on the SLDC website under consultations. All consultations undertaken by SLDC and in partnership with SLDC will be listed including the full details and the results of consultations. The consultations of other partners will also be on the site and this will help in joint consultations and avoidance of duplications. The database is searchable and a complete record for partners and the public.

The database will hold the details of consultations from the financial year 2009/10 onwards. Each lead officer for consultations will be given access to update the Consultation and Community Engagement Database using the information required as stated in the Consultation Toolkit (appendix 1). Full training on the database will be provided through the programme of training and awareness raising – see 3.5 and as needed by the Community Engagement Officer.

Action 3: The Consultation and Community Engagement Database be accepted and used widely.

3.5 Annual Consultation Programme

Services that are planning to consult must use their service plan and the Forward Plan to document the consultations for the year and ensure the consultation has been added to the Annual Consultation Programme. The service must ensure they have sufficient resources and arrangements in place to consult effectively.

The information supplied will be used to populate the Councils Consultation and Community Engagement Database and must, therefore, be clear and concise.

The Annual Consultation Programme will be reviewed annually at the end of the preceding financial year. The review will take into account expectations from the service planning process, any corporate or statutory consultation requirements. The previous level of consultation (to avoid consultation fatigue), resourcing and staff capacity to complete the consultations to the best effect also needs to be considered and taken into account. The Annual Consultation Programme will link in with the Strategic Planning and Performance Management Framework.

The Annual Consultation Programme will be approved by Corporate Management Team. The draft programme for 2010/11 is appendix 2.

Action 4: The establishment of the Annual Consultation Programme and Review process

3.6 Support, training and awareness raising

The Community Engagement Officer will lead on agreed corporate consultations such as the Place Survey and Community Voice (Citizens Panel) Surveys, these are identified in the Consultation programme. For the remaining consultations the Community Engagement Officer will be available for support and guidance, where needed. The Community Engagement Officer will also require the consultation to be logged using the Consultation Planning Template, to ensure all consultations are carried out effectively and are entered onto the Consultation and Community Engagement Database.

A programme of training and awareness raising will be scheduled through summer and autumn 2010 as part of the community Intelligence project also incorporating wider community engagement training. This will include:

- Community Engagement Standards – scheduled for 21st May 2010
- Consultation and Community Engagement Database
- Consultation Toolkit guidance which will form part of a Community Engagement Toolkit

Action 5: The establishment of a Training and Awareness raising programme

Section 4: Key actions

1. Adopt the Consultation Principles and apply Cumbria Community Engagement Standards
2. Adopt the Consultation Toolkit, including the Consultation Planning Template
3. Ensure full use of Consultation and Community Engagement Database
4. Establish an Annual Consultation Programme and review process
5. Programme of training and awareness raising.

Consultation Strategy documentation: Appendices list

1. Consultation Toolkit
 - 1a. Consultation Planning Template and guidance
 - 1b. Consultation and Community Engagement Database Quick Guide
 - 1c. Cumbria Community Engagement Standards self assessment guidance.
2. Annual Consultation Programme