

Community Engagement Strategy

2012 update

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Introduction

The Community Engagement Strategy was produced in 2007. This update will summarise the Community Engagement practices being undertaken by South Lakeland District Council at the moment.

Community Engagement is defined by the Department of Communities and Local Government 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’.

What is happening now?

Work is continually undertaken to ensure that engagement is carried out at the appropriate level and the most appropriate methods are used (Appendix 1: Levels of Engagement Table).

Annually a Community Engagement Programme is produced allowing for a complete picture of the consultations, and other engagement activities.

This programme:

- Avoids consultation clashes
- Reduces consultation fatigue, and
- Allows officers to direct resources and support appropriately.

Empowering communities

There are significant opportunities offered to the council by collaborating with and empowering communities. The Localism Act encourages further ways for the public to work with the Council and be involved in the services we deliver. Effective engagement and partnership working are essential and closely linked to delivering localism. It is also clear that partners need to have a more practical focus on where working together can add value.

Localism is active in South Lakeland in many ways:

- The Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) identify priorities, deliver projects and lobby organisations on behalf of their communities.
- A growing number of communities are taking steps to deliver services such as toilets, tourist information centres and car parks.
- There are two Localism pilot projects underway:
 1. The Neighbourhood Planning pilot is being undertaken by Heversham Parish Council and Hincaster Parish Meeting, who have just

completed their initial community consultation. Neighbourhood planning is led by the local community, not the council, and is about building neighbourhoods not stopping growth. Neighbourhood Plans must be set within the context of national policies and the Local Development Framework.

2. The Participatory Budgeting pilot is going to be undertaken by both Ulverston and Windermere Town Councils. Participatory budgeting will empower communities to influence decisions on general areas, make decisions about budget issues and place some budgets under their direct control.

Community Led Plans are produced for the community, by the community. They set out the vision for the future of an area based on wide spread engagement. Community Led Planning is being encouraged by the council with officer support and a Service Level Agreement with Action for Communities in Cumbria (ACT) providing independent support and training for groups. This helps the communities produce plans based on robust local information and the Parish, Local Area Partnership and the council use these to set priorities and plan services.

Consultation

In partnership with the One South Lakeland Partnership Community Engagement Task and Finish Group, the councils Consultation Toolkit is being refreshed to produce a resource which can be used by all spectrums of the community. The council is also signed up to the Cumbria Compact and its guidance for engagement with the coluntary and community sector.

The Have Your Say Database holds information on consultations being carried out by the council and partner organisations. The database is a partnership resource for all councils in Cumbria plus the Police and NHS Cumbria. Other organisations both public, voluntary and community sector can add their consultations to the database and use the Quick Consult online survey software which is included with the Database. By keeping all consultation information in one place, it is:

- Easier to monitor activity
- Provide access to results, and
- Reduce consultation fatigue.

Community Voice the counties citizens'panel is also managed by the partnership of local authorities. Surveys of the panel are carried out regularly; the councils involvement is being reviewed in June 2012 to ensure it is still meeting our needs. The partnership is also undertaking a Quality of Life Survey to fill the data gap left by the Place Survey.

The Research and Intelligence Unit continually improve the web mapping, local intelligence and performance data. Making this information transparent and available to partners and communities will:

- Help the public to be empowered to make choices about services delivered by the council
- Ensure our data is useful, and
- Available to those who need it.

Next steps

The Community Engagement Officer will continue to support engagement, helping officers to join up engagement to make it more effective and efficient across the council. Also the officer will continually develop the resources available to help make engagement simpler to perform. The Community Engagement Officer will also continue to provide support to communities carrying out engagement, at Parish/ LAP level and in partnership with other organisations.

Specific support will be provided by:

- Continued work on the empowerment of communities through effective engagement, working with and supporting the localism pilots, community led plans and wider partnership work.
- Reviewing Community Voice and report to Senior Management Team following the next survey cycle.
- The continued development of the Consultation Toolkit and additional resources including Questionnaire Design, Guide and a Question Bank.
- Continuing to populate the Consultation and Community Engagement database with consultations including the results and next steps.
- Using South Lakeland News to inform the public of the work of the council and to feedback the results of engagement and what has happened as a result of the engagement.
- Producing a guide using consultation results, and census data where available, summarising the demography and views of the communities in the district.

Appendix 1: Levels of Community Engagement

Informing

Informing includes communicating and early engagement.

How to engage

Tell the public something, make information transparent and easy to understand and use using marketing, public relations and/or campaigns.

Methods used

Newspapers, (South Lakeland News), letter, posters, radio, leaflets, website, social media, meetings, seminars, event and exhibitions.

Outcome

The public will know what's happening across South Lakeland

Researching

How to engage

Investigating or finding out something new about an area or population in order to improve service delivery using quantitative and qualitative processes.

Methods used

For example: census, joint strategic assessments, steam data, Experian data, peer reviews, mystery shippers, ward surgeries with members, reports produced by other agencies, community engagement database, customer feedback blue box units, customer complaints and feedback.

Outcome

Communities truly feel their views are listened to.

Consulting

How to engage

Seeking comments or feedback on a question or a proposal which can lead to change.

Methods used

Questionnaires, surveys, Community Voice, road shows, focus groups, ward surgeries, existing forums, conferences, referendums, simulators, public meeting, website, phone calls.

Outcome

Communities truly feel their views are listened to.

Involving

(idea collection)

How to engage

Include the public in decision-making processes. Show a genuine interest in good innovative ideas.

Methods used

This can include direct involvement in the corporate planning, service planning, development or improvements to a community. Community Led Plans.

Outcome

Communities feel they are involved in planning service delivery.

Collaborating

Includes devolving decisions from idea to details plans.

How to engage

Empowering communities to make decisions. Allow sufficient time for 'communities' to take part.

Methods used

The public takes part proactively in decisions, for example on budget development or improvement to a community. Participatory Budgeting.

Outcome

Communities truly influence decision making.

Empowering

Supporting community action

How to engage

Power influence and responsibility are given to communities (within law) to develop and improve their area.

Methods used

This can include grants to improve their local area, supporting to develop local initiatives and/or managing and running council services. Local Area Partnerships and Locality pilots.

Outcome

Communities develop solutions/improvements to local issues and carry out or facilitate their delivery.