

Basingstoke and Deane Local Strategic Partnership Involved Communities Strategy and Action Plan



Involved Communities Strategy

I What is it?

I.1 The purpose of this strategy

- I.1.1 This strategy has been developed by the Basingstoke and Deane Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to enable it to coordinate its approach to community involvement across its partner organisations.
- I.1.2 The LSP brings together, at a local level, the different parts of the public, private, community and voluntary sectors. This includes councils, health services, emergency services and housing associations, as well as schools and colleges, voluntary groups and the business community. It provides a single overarching framework in which other partnerships can operate and enables different initiatives and services to support one another so that they can work together more effectively. By pooling experience and expertise, the partnership has a much wider understanding of local people, places and problems. It can make sure the right actions are taken and right services delivered.
- I.1.3 This strategy aims to provide a framework for community involvement in the borough and seeks to build on the work done already by setting out ways in which local people can become involved with organisations that shape where they live, and work together to improve the local area. It has been developed so that members of the public can contribute to the realisation of the vision of the Local Strategic Partnership for the borough set out in *Pride in Our Place* - the community strategy for Basingstoke and Deane.
- I.1.4 The Local Strategic Partnership recognises its leadership role in the community in terms of making the best overall use of resources. It recognises the benefit of agencies, organisations and communities working together to improve the local area and ensure that decision making reflects local people's priorities and that the development of services matches local need.
- I.1.5 Many of the partners run public engagement activities, but recognise the need to work together and go beyond existing practices to explore much wider involvement of communities in shaping the places where they live and the services provided for them.
- I.1.6 The strategy is designed to strengthen and enhance the work of individual organisations that will retain responsibility for specific engagement activities in the framework of this strategy.

2 What does this strategy cover?

2.1 What is a community?

2.1.1 Communities can be:

- **Communities of place** - where the 'community' is defined by a geographical area with physical boundaries for example a village or parish or a housing estate. These communities may have similar concerns about issues that affect their local area.
- **Communities of interest** – where the 'community' is defined by a shared interest, experience or situation. Examples include young people, disabled people, sports clubs, and voluntary groups. Additionally there are people who are concerned about specific issues for example the environment or crime and each of these communities of interest may require a different way to engage or be engaged.

2.1.2 The Local Strategic Partnership recognises that each community will have different needs and that this will have to be balanced and prioritised in the delivery of services and initiatives.

2.2 What do we mean by community involvement?

2.2.1 Community involvement can take many different forms and each and every type of involvement is important to organisations to help them in their decision making and service provision. In an area such as Basingstoke and Deane, it may not always be possible to reach consensus around issues however greater involvement and participation will bring about better understanding of sometimes complex issues.

2.2.2 Community involvement is a term covering many different activities either carried out with people that make up communities or started by the communities themselves. There are many different definitions and interchangeable terms. For 'community' you could read 'resident', 'citizen', 'public' or 'service user'. Instead of 'involvement', you may mean 'consultation', 'engagement' or 'participation'. Basically the strategy and action plan sets out to encourage more people to get involved in their community and decisions that affect them.

2.2.3 Even the title of the strategy reflects feedback from LSP partners, as at the 2008 LSP conference delegates said 'community involvement strategy' sounded like something that was 'done to residents' rather than reflecting their needs.

3 Who we will involve?

3.1 This strategy covers any consultation, research, engagement or involvement activity with:

- residents and citizens
- service customers and users
- non-users and potential users of services
- businesses and business organisations
- community, tenant and resident groups
- interest and pressure groups
- voluntary groups
- communities and neighbourhoods
- groups of people defined by a common factor such as age, disability, gender, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation.
- hard to reach groups such as mobile populations, refugee communities, people for whom English is not their first language, or people who need information in specialist formats.
- public and private sector stakeholders.

4 Scope

4.1 This strategy covers all elements of community engagement and recommends that partners should acknowledge which of these five elements they are seeking to achieve with any particular activity:

- **Inform** - making sure people have the information they need
- **Consult** - getting feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions
- **Involve** - working directly with people to ensure concerns and aspirations are understood and considered
- **Collaborate** - working in partnership with public in each aspect of decision including development of alternatives and identification of solution
- **Empower** - placing the final decision-making in the hands of the public

5 What are we aiming to achieve?

5.1 The benefits of a joint strategy

5.2 The *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities* – statutory guidance says that LSPs should “have oversight of and coordinate community consultation and engagement activities of individual partners and where appropriate combine them”.

5.2.1 In May 2008, the Basingstoke and Deane LSP Board agreed to the development of a joint community involvement strategy. This was aimed at recognising that all partners are serving the same community, making the best use of resources and sharing information to ensure better outcomes across all service providers. The board set the objectives of:

- A more joined up approach to involving the community in the decisions about their neighbourhoods and services
- More efficiency in working together on surveys and consultation events
- Avoiding consultation fatigue and making more sense to the public
- Avoiding duplication, especially in the area of neighbourhood representation
- Encouraging more efficient data sharing to build a profile of individual communities and their needs (potentially cutting the need for some consultations if the questions have already been asked by partners)

5.3 The LSP Conference in July 2008 had the theme ‘People at the heart, communities taking part’, with discussion groups looking at how partners could work together to improve their community involvement work. A poll of some 100 delegates at the conference, representing a range of different partners, showed support for a joint strategy. The poll showed 55% thought that was the only way to make things happen and a further 34% could see some benefits.

5.4 Local Area Agreement Targets

5.4.1 LSP partners are expected to contribute towards achieving the Hampshire Local Area Agreement targets. One of these relates to community involvement work:

- NI 4 – the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality

5.5 The Place Survey

5.5.1 Assessment of this target will be through responses to the bi-annual Place Survey, carried out under Audit Commission guidelines to benchmark local authorities and their performance. A postal survey of randomly-selected residents asks questions to check residents’ perceptions of how far they feel involved in their local area.

5.5.2 This asks the following questions:

- Q13 - Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?
- Q14 - Generally speaking, would you like to be more involved in the decisions that affect your local area?

- 5.5.3 It also asks questions about groups to which the respondents belong, which make decisions that affect their local area (outside the requirements of their job).
- 5.5.4 The first survey is being carried out in September 2008 with reports back in March/April 2009. This will set baselines against which specific targets for improving community involvement can be set.

5.6 The Comprehensive Area Assessment

- 5.6.1 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 introduces a new national performance framework, changing the way in which public services are assessed and monitored. The Act replaces Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) with Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) which focuses on how well local public agencies work together to deliver better outcomes in an area.
- 5.6.2 Community engagement is a fundamental component of CAA. The area assessment consists of three questions the first of which is 'How well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations?' This is intended to encourage partners to involve local people in deciding priorities, shaping services, and helping to assess whether outcomes have been achieved. It will examine how well local partners understand, engage with and involve communities, in particular those whose circumstances make them vulnerable or hard to reach. The CAA methodology has been consulted on and will be formally launched in April 2009.

6 What do we need to consider

6.1 Local policy framework

- 6.1.1 *Pride in Our Place*, the Basingstoke and Deane LSP's community strategy, has the theme of creating 'an inclusive borough with strong communities'. This says the borough's communities should be able to influence decision-making that affects their lives. It sets the outcomes:
- C2: Communities and individuals are routinely involved in the planning of both the physical environment and services that affect their lives.
 - C4: Neighbourhoods have strong networks which are accessible to all residents and help them take responsibility for their communities.

6.2 National policy framework

- 6.2.1 The community empowerment duties on the LSP partners are changing and increasing.
- 6.2.2 There are a number of significant changes in the **Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007**. These include:
- a duty on the borough and county councils, health services and police to inform, consult and involve local people and their representatives from April 2009.
 - a councillor call for action which has not yet been implemented and on which guidance is due at the end of the year.
 - the expectation that the council should look at closer partnership working in its community involvement work.
- 6.2.3 The **Community Empowerment White Paper**, released this summer, introduces:
- a duty to respond to petitions on the council and some partners
 - encouragement to set up more neighbourhood councils.
 - participatory budgeting for all local communities by 2012.

6.3 Feedback from the community

- 6.3.1 Feedback from residents and forums in the development of this joint strategy has shown a need to improve how we co-ordinate and carry out our community involvement work as a council and with our partners. Key messages from consultation were:
- Don't duplicate, asking the same questions someone else has already asked us!
 - Don't make us make all the effort if you need our views!
 - Be honest about the amount of input we can have
 - Let us know what you have done with what you told us
 - Make things easy to understand and don't use jargon
 - I'm only interested when things are relevant to me
 - Will it make a difference?
- 6.4 There was some scepticism about getting involved as often they didn't get to find out what decision was taken and whether their views had made any difference.
- 6.4.1 Discussion groups at the LSP Conference in July 2008 focussed on actions that could improve community involvement.

7 Roles and responsibilities

7.1 The Local Strategic Partnership

7.1.1 The LSP has a key role in co-ordinating community involvement, sharing best practice and making more efficient use of resources.

7.2 The partners

7.2.1 Partners are already allocating appropriate staff time, resources, training and funds to enable communities to become engaged. This strategy is aimed at making best use of resources by encouraging partners to align activities wherever possible.

7.3 The elected representatives

7.3.1 Councillors are the people elected by communities to represent them. They are central to the aims and objectives of this strategy and the action plans to achieve the objectives.

7.3.2 Councillors elected to represent a certain area of the borough – parish, borough and county councillors- have a key role to play in engaging their communities. They should be involved and kept informed of any consultations and involvement activities that impact on the areas they serve.

8 Key principles

8.1 LSP partners, we will commit to the following principles. In all community involvement work, partners will:

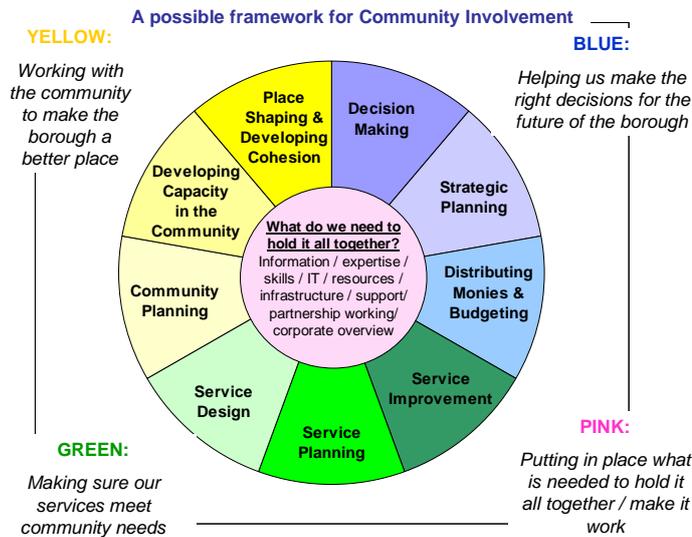
- **aim to reduce duplication and join up and align consultations and community involvement activities where possible.**
- **ensure, first, that consultation is needed and the questions haven't already been answered.** Information on previous feedback will be shared between partners to ensure the questions have not been answered before.
- **make the purpose clear and be honest about the degree of influence respondents have.** Partners will be clear about what the proposals or options are, who may be affected, what questions are asked, when a decision will be taken and the scope for any consultation or involvement to make a difference to the decision.
- **give easy-to-understand information,** with no jargon or assumptions about prior knowledge and cutting use of acronyms (confusing initials to stand for things) so that input is well-informed
- **use community involvement methods appropriately.** Resources should be assigned on the basis of relevance and impact of the decision being taken, ensuring the method chosen is cost effective.

- **be community-led.** Where possible, partners should aim to go out into communities and link with activities already going on, such as neighbourhood events, rather than trying to get the community to come to specially arranged consultations.
- **share what we learn from communities to ensure they are not being asked the same thing by different partners.** Partners will work together to build knowledge of community needs.
- **involve partners early in developing key policies and services** and taking decisions for the borough. Good forward planning will ensure that all organisations have the opportunity to discuss and consider their input. The *One Compact for Hampshire* agreement about joint working between the voluntary sector and public sector bodies suggests aiming for 12 weeks when consulting with the voluntary sector. Flagging up what issues and decisions will need their input and feedback early will allow bodies to get them onto their agendas early fitting with their meeting cycles, therefore, mean that there does not have to be a long formal period of consultation. Parish councils also request that they are given good notice of issues to ensure they can be discussed in meetings. Parish councils ask for a minimum of six to eight weeks' notice to ensure that items can be properly discussed by relevant committees and councillors.
- **involve key stakeholders and representative groups early,** engaging with them in advance of specific community engagement activities so that they can flag up possible issues and give views on the most effective means of involving the community.
- **give people adequate time to prepare their response.** It is recognised that the length of time will vary depending on the time of year and the level of response that is being sought.
- **allow all groups and individuals to have a say in decisions that affect their lives.** Ensure that those most directly affected by plans and decisions are aware of opportunities for community engagement.
- **ensure that we take into account particular needs and overcome any difficulties participants may have to enable them to participate.** Partners will give particular consideration to the needs of people with impaired sight or hearing or who have learning difficulties; people whose first language is not English or who cannot read at all and people who might have problems with physical access such as people in wheelchairs and people with pushchairs. They will also take steps to ensure that, where relevant to them, we hear the views of younger people, older people, people from ethnic minority communities and others whose views are frequently excluded.
- **ensure that important decisions are publicised and people know how they can give their views.** As well as informing the public through local media, other ways of raising awareness in the local community will be used, including community and parish magazines, that are already well-read locally, to raise awareness about decisions and issues needing feedback from residents.

- **make sure that if communities have engaged, we keep them informed about progress or decisions.** Accessible feedback will be provided both on the results of consultation and on how the consultation has influenced the policy, service or other outcome, in order to encourage greater public participation in the future.
- **ensure there are clear methods for communities to raise issues and needs.** There should be a transparent process for people to raise issues affecting their community with those who can take action on them across the Basingstoke and Deane LSP's partners. All partners need to work together to ensure that it is not difficult for residents to raise issues or to understand who is responsible for taking action on them.
- **make a commitment to shared learning and continuous improvement** in community involvement methods and planning. Those carrying out the consultation and community engagement should evaluate its effectiveness, what was learnt and what impact it had. This learning should be shared with colleagues and partners. This evaluation should also reflect on the method of consultation chosen and whether it was the most cost-effective approach. The LSP will develop methods to facilitate this sharing of good practice and lessons learnt.
- **use standard demographic questions** relating to age, ethnicity, faith, disability, gender, and sexual orientation **in order to improve comparability and tracking over time.**

9 What decisions and issues should communities be involved in?

9.1 Model below, developed by Hampshire County Council, shows all the areas where we need to consider how we involve the community.



9.2 New duties on the council to inform, consult and involve the public from April 2009 and to work with partners on more effective and co-ordinated engagement for local communities, especially in 'place shaping'. Under the act the council needs to provide local people (and their representatives) with:

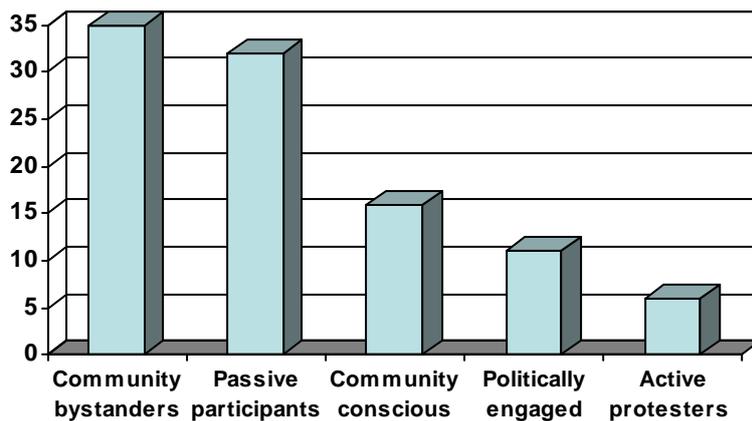
- appropriate (accessible and easily-understandable and tailored to specific audiences where necessary) information about services, policies and decisions which affect them, or might be of interest to them, supporting them to have their say and get involved
- appropriate opportunities to have their say about the decisions and services that affect them through consultation. Examples include formal (including mandatory) consultations, satisfaction surveys and citizens' juries.

9.3 Where it is appropriate, *the Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities – statutory guidance* also says more interactive forms of engagement should be used, giving opportunities to:

- influence decisions (for example participatory budgeting; citizen juries);
- provide feedback on decisions, services and policies (for example 'have your say' section on website; feedback forms);
- co-design/work with the authority in designing policies and services (for example being involved in the commissioning of services);
- co-produce/carry out some aspects of services for themselves (for example having responsibility for the maintenance of a community centre or communities taking part in 'street clean up' or environmental conservation work); and
- work with the council in assessing services (for example citizens acting as mystery shoppers).

10 Do people want to be involved?

- 10.1 This strategy takes account of the fact that people need to be kept well informed about what is happening in their local community and decisions that affect them.
- 10.2 The Audit Commission Best Value Performance Indicators Survey 2006/2007 found that overall satisfaction with local authorities closely correlated with influence felt over local decisions.
- 10.3 However national research suggests that the community does not always want to be involved in decisions that affect them. Research by Mori and the Audit Commission suggests that between 50 and 60% of the public just want public service providers to get on with the job; 25 to 40% only get involved around specific life choices such as moving house and 2 to 5% are citizen activists.
- 10.4 Research by the Henley centre Headlight/Vision in 2007 showed that the majority of the community were 'bystanders' who did not want to get involved or 'passive participants' who only got involved when something directly related to them:



- 10.5 Feedback from consultation with forums in the borough in the development of this strategy bears out this research and suggests that people will only seek to become involved in decisions that are directly relevant and impact on them.
- 10.6 Therefore a key principle is that people should be given the opportunity to get involved and give their views but that it should be understood that they may not choose to take up that opportunity.

11 How are we going to put the strategy into action?

11.1 LSP action plan

11.2 This lays out timescales and responsibilities for achieving the aims and principles of the strategy.

11.3 The LSP Communications and Community Involvement Group

11.3.1 This LSP cross-cutting task group, which brings together professionals in the field from across key partners, will oversee the development of systems will be developed to better share the results of previous consultations, research and community involvement activities.

12 How will we know if it's working? - reporting and evaluation

12.1 The strategy will be reviewed and progress reported back to the LSP Board.

12.2 The first bi-annual Place Survey carried out in September 2008 will set the benchmark for the percentage of residents that feel involved in decisions affecting their local area. Partners should seek to include questions about how involved people feel in surveys they are carrying out, where relevant, so that feedback can be continually monitored.