

Community Engagement Strategy 2015 - 2020



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Document Control

Revision History

Version	Revision Date	Comment
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Document Approvals

This document was endorsed/approved by the following:

Sponsor Approval	Date
Senior Management Team	
Strategy Group	
Council	

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Foreword by Councillor Wayne Howard, Access and Communication Portfolio Holder

I am pleased to introduce Daventry District Council's Community Engagement Strategy for 2015-2020.

Our Council is committed to involving local people in shaping the area where they live and the services they receive. We recognise the vital role that effective community engagement plays in helping residents to be better informed, involved in decision-making and to feel that they can influence change in their communities.

This strategy builds upon previous work by setting out objectives and actions for improving and expanding our current consultation and engagement practices. It also sets out our principles for engagement and provides a clear framework that will help the Council to co-ordinate and target its engagement activities more effectively, to ensure they deliver real benefits within the local community.

As our Council continues its work with partners over the next five years towards our vision to Develop a Better District, this strategy will be a valuable tool in ensuring the ongoing involvement of local communities.



Councillor Wayne Howard

Access and Communication Portfolio Holder, Daventry District Council

Introduction

The Council is committed to involving local people in shaping their area and services they receive. Consultation and engagement is one of the key ways the Council involves local communities and residents in the decision making process.

This strategy has been developed to strengthen our existing community engagement practices. It aims to ensure that the way we engage is effective, efficient and provides real benefits.

We believe the best way to do this is to:

- Manage and coordinate community engagement activities to ensure consistency and quality
- Ensure that all communities are able to participate effectively
- Ensure the communication of outcomes.

This strategy provides guidance for undertaking engagement activities either by Officers and Members or by a third party on behalf of the Council. It is supported by an action plan that sets out what needs to be done to further improve engagement across the Council and by the Engagement Toolkit, which provides practical guidance for officers and members.

This strategy sits alongside the Council's Statement of Community Involvement which sets out the minimum consultation standards for the development of statutory planning documents and planning applications. Where statutory consultation requirements are in place, such as on traffic regulation orders, those standards will apply.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is about the activities we undertake with people within our community to decide what gets done in the District and how it is delivered. Communities can be:

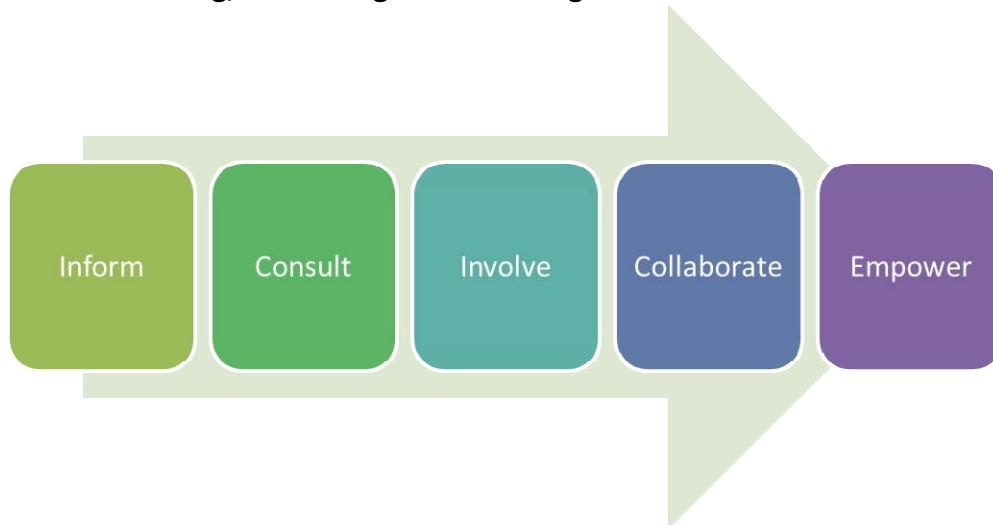
- **Communities of Place** - people within a defined geographical area, often communities of place refer to the very local neighbourhoods or villages rather than wider geographical areas.
- **Communities of Interest** - people who share a particular experience, interest or characteristic other than place.

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

Community engagement is a two-way process. It involves communities in making decisions that can lead to improvements in the quality of their life and allow them to take part in shaping the places in which they live and services they receive. Engagement requires much more active involvement from communities than consultation alone, with an emphasis on building relationships so that participants remain involved on an ongoing basis. However, it is recognised that people vary in their desire to be engaged, and this must be respected.

What are the different levels of engagement?

Daventry District Council's Community Engagement Strategy is based on the widely accepted 'ladder of participation' model¹, which shows an increasing level of community involvement as one moves "up" the ladder. The main levels of community engagement the Council uses are informing, consulting and involving.



Informing – lets people know about services or plans for the future. This could be via a newsletter, media release, social media, fact sheet, website or public information event.

Consultation – can be used for a number of reasons: to gather views and new ideas, to test options and preferences, or to understand possible consequences of a policy or project. This could take the form of a focus group, public meeting or survey.

Involving – actively includes people in the development and decision-making processes of a project or policy to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are reflected in the options and the decisions taken.

Collaboration – working in partnership with the community including development of the options and identification of the preferred solutions.

Empowerment – places the final decision-making in the hands of the community. It is the most ambitious level of engagement where communities develop and implement their own plans with support from public and voluntary organisations. It may be described as direct democracy.

All of these types of engagement are important and have their merits depending on the particular situation. The Council will carefully consider the nature, scale and impact of the issue before deciding on which level of engagement to use.

¹ Originally proposed by Arnstein, Sherry R. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," JAIP, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224.

Why do we engage?

There are many benefits of effective community engagement for the Council and our local communities.

Community engagement helps the Council to:

- better understand and respond to the needs of local people
- be more accountable to local people
- plan and deliver better services
- make more efficient use of public resources
- take transparent decisions based on strong evidence
- build strong and positive relationships within and between local communities
- test out ideas and explore emerging issues
- measure the performance of the Council in delivering services
- meet legal requirements such as the best value duties under the Local Government Act 1999.

The local community will:

- have a greater say and choice in the design and delivery of local services
- develop new skills and expertise
- become better informed about the Council's work.

However, engagement activities which are done badly can lead to misleading results, undermine the whole process and reduce the prospect that people will engage again. There are also times when it is not appropriate, for example:

- If the decision is under strict direction from Government
- If we have already recently asked for views on a similar topic
- If the Council is in the process of implementing existing plans.

Engagement Principles

Daventry District Council has established the following principles so that everyone is clear about what we are trying to achieve. Community Engagement activity:

- has a clear purpose
- is timely
- is planned, programmed and publicised well in advance
- is run jointly with partners where appropriate
- engages and involves partners appropriately and early so they can add value
- is open to all and includes service users and representative stakeholders
- gives people a choice of different ways to give their views where practical
- seeks to engage with all appropriate sections of the community
- respects the democratic role of Members
- publishes the results
- is evaluated and improved on for the future by learning lessons
- feeds back the results to those involved
- uses the results to make a difference.

Engagement will be undertaken whenever a new policy or service is proposed or there is a significant change proposed to a policy or service, unless this is required by law or Government direction, or is otherwise unavoidable.

The Council will also look to incorporate the approach set out in the Cabinet Office Guidance on Consultation Principles (issued Oct 2013) where appropriate. The Cabinet Office advises that the type and scale of engagement should be proportionate to the potential impacts of the proposal under consideration. This is sensible and should help engagement achieve value for money.

Who do we engage with?

Internally, the Council must ensure that all staff (Officers) and those who provide services are aware of the Council's strategic objectives and their role within the organisation and be given opportunities to influence decisions and how services are provided. Part of this is about sharing information between Teams and service areas and also between Officers and Members.

Externally the same applies. The range of groups with which the Council might engage is extensive. It includes residents, service users and potential service users, community and voluntary sector organisations, town and parish councils, local businesses and other partner organisations. Our community needs to be aware of the priorities for the Council and be given the opportunity to influence them to ensure they reflect the needs of the District as a whole.

It is important to ensure that engagement is inclusive and recognises that extra steps may need to be taken to involve some people, for instance people with disabilities or from an ethnic minority. The Council aims to get a good cross-section of involvement – not just rely

on those who speak loudest. This means setting up, supporting and encouraging a range of opportunities for people to get involved in ways that suit them.

Who has responsibility for engagement?

Engagement is the collective responsibility of every Member and Officer, as appropriate to their role.



How will the Council ensure engagement is effective?

Measuring Performance

It is important to understand how we are doing when it comes to evaluating the success of this policy. We will use a variety of methods to measure this, including:

- Residents' perceptions – to what extent do people feel involved in Daventry District Council decision making.
- Evaluating the extent to which people's responses to consultations influence the final decision.

Monitoring and reviewing progress

The strategy will be refreshed every five years, or earlier if significant legislative changes require it. A consultation summary will be reported to SMT on an annual basis which will also identify if the Action Plan requires updating.

Appendix 1

Community Engagement Action Plan 2015 – 2020

STRATEGY OBJECTIVE 1: MANAGE AND COORDINATE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES TO ENSURE CONSISTENCY AND QUALITY			
Key Activity	Action/Deliverables	Lead Officer	Milestones
Revise and publish the Community Engagement Strategy	Formal adoption of Community Engagement Strategy by Council Annual consultation report to SMT/Strategy Group	Partnership & Policy Officer Partnership & Policy Officer	By 1 st August 2015 Annual
Embed the use of the Community Engagement Strategy and Toolkit	Update Toolkit (including information about social media and the role of members in community engagement) Promotion of the strategy and toolkit throughout the Council via <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-learning module • Council Courier, Council website & Davnet • Team meetings and mini-briefings • Members (eg induction pack) 	Partnership & Policy Officer	By 1 st August 2015 Ongoing
Residents Survey	Carry out a residents' survey every three years.	Partnership & Policy Officer	Triennial (with first survey in 16/17)
Effective planning and scheduling of consultation activity	Work with service managers to identify and plan for engagement activities and improve engagement information on the website.	Partnership & Policy Officer/Service Managers	Ongoing
Ensure officers and members are appropriately trained	Officers and members who are regularly involved in engagement activities should undertake appropriate training. This could include training in the use of Participatory Appraisal techniques.	Partnership & Policy Officer/Service Managers	Ongoing

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STRATEGY OBJECTIVE 2: ENSURE THAT ALL COMMUNITIES ARE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE EFFECTIVELY			
Key Activity	Action/Deliverables	Lead Officer	Milestones
Continue to develop and utilise the People's Panel	Continue recruitment to the panel with particular focus of increasing numbers and diversity to ensure representation including developing a youth arm of the panel. Hold at least one face to face panel meeting per year.	Partnership & Policy Officer Partnership & Policy Officer/	Ongoing Annual
Improve engagement with 'hard to reach' groups	Identify stakeholders and work with them to develop preferred methods of engagement	Partnership & Policy Officer/ Equalities Officer	By August 2016 and Ongoing
Develop better engagement tools for rural areas[/parish councils]	Work with [parish councils and other] rural stakeholders to develop better engagement tools for this section of the community.	Partnerships & Policy Officer/ Communications and Marketing Manager	By August 2016 and Ongoing
Strengthen the role of Members in community engagement	Update Engagement Toolkit to include section aimed at councillors Develop procedures to strengthen the role of ward councillors in area specific consultations. Identify new methods for the public to engage with Council processes eg consider holding a consultation on topics for Scrutiny and Improvement Committee and wider use of social media.	Partnerships & Policy Officer/ Members	By August 2015 and Ongoing

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STRATEGY OBJECTIVE 3:

ENSURE THE COMMUNICATION OF OUTCOMES

Key Activity	Action/Deliverables	Lead Officer	Milestones
Improve feedback to those involved with engagement activity	Develop consistent feedback procedures and mechanisms to be used across the Council. This should include publishing a summary of the feedback received, show how the results have been used to influence final decisions and feedback the results and decisions to those that took the time to get involved.	Partnerships & Policy Officer/ Service Managers	By April 2016
	All feedback from consultation activities to be visible from a single location on the website	Partnerships & Policy Officer	Ongoing
	Provide training to officers involved with consultations to ensure that a standardised approach to communicating outcomes is adopted.	Partnership & Policy Officer	Ongoing