



Community Engagement Framework

Community Engagement Framework for North Lincolnshire Council

Our council's vision is to transform North Lincolnshire towards a better future for all. This means improving North Lincolnshire as a place to live, work and visit. We want to see an area that is thriving; communities that are confident and caring; a place where individuals can see the difference; and where everyone works together for the benefit of North Lincolnshire.

All the residents of North Lincolnshire have the right to influence the future of their area. This can only be achieved through active engagement of the people who use and deliver our services, and by building a shared sense of pride in North Lincolnshire. Our commitment to engagement is clear. However this is reinforced by the government's recent White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, which states,

"People should be empowered and supported to control their lives, trusted to be consulted and, where they want to be, involved in running services used by the whole community. Our proposals... aim to support local government to deliver more responsive services, extend choice and control, give individuals and community groups a real say over services, and strengthen the role citizens and communities play in shaping the place they live."

For these reasons, we have developed this engagement framework that is designed to help guide and inform how our engagement activities. This will help us to affirm our commitment to truly engaging the people and communities of North Lincolnshire.

Aims of the Framework

We want everyone in North Lincolnshire to be involved and able to influence the future of our area. This framework seeks to promote and support strong, active and inclusive communities who are able to shape the development of policies and delivery of services, and to enable us to enhance quality of life across North Lincolnshire.

The aims of the framework are:

- To provide opportunities for communities to shape and influence the development and delivery of quality services and policies that reflect local needs and priorities.
- To establish a coordinated and consistent approach to engagement that avoids duplication.
- To ensure that engagement is carried out to a high professional and ethical standard.
- To ensure engagement is inclusive and accessible to all and that it provides opportunities for participation from all communities within North Lincolnshire, particularly people and groups that may be harder to reach.
- To keep our communities informed of the outcomes of engagement.

- To provide variety and flexibility in the ways in which we carry out engagement activities.
- To establish robust systems of review and quality control of all engagement activities.

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is a term that is often used with little or no meaning. Therefore, it is important that we have a shared understanding of what community engagement is.

Community – The term community is broadly accepted as having different meanings. There can be:

- **Communities of place** where the community is defined by its geographical area with physical boundaries such as a housing estate, neighbourhood, parish or village.
- **Communities of interest** where there is an identification of common interest to the people within the community, other than where they live although it may refer to their background. Examples of this include groups such as single parents, young people, people with disabilities, business leaders, people who identify as gay/lesbian/bisexual, people from black and ethnic minority (BME) communities, older people and people from particular faith groups.

People often belong to more than one community. Even within the definition of 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.

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, and may require more specific or alternative methods of engagement. We believe that everyone in North Lincolnshire has a right to be involved and engaged in the way that the council operates and we are keen to make sure that all necessary steps are taken to remove barriers and widen involvement of all hard to reach groups.

Engagement – There are many different terms that are used to describe engagement activities such as consultation, involvement, participation, development, research and so on. It is important that the correct terminology is used when undertaking any form of engagement activity in order to avoid confusion and clarify purpose.

The duty of best value, prescribed by the government, sets out a ladder of participation to illustrate the different levels of engagement – inform, consult, involve, devolve. It is necessary to understand that there is no perfect level of engagement, but that different levels or combinations of levels are best suited to different services and activities. Having said that, the government strongly encourages us to engage at the highest level possible on the ladder of participation.

- **Inform** – This is simply a one-way communication that provides solid, accessible information on how to access services and on how local services are performing. It allows people to make an informed decision on how/when/where/whether to access a service. It also includes telling people about what we have done and how well we did it and as such is an important part of the performance management process. Examples include Direct, press releases in the local media, stories on the website and staff working in neighbourhoods. In the future, we may look at other innovative ways to keep residents informed such as through emails, text messaging or community forums.
- **Consult** – This is a two-way communication and includes researching needs, attitudes and priorities to help inform the decision making process. It also involves listening and offering choices to those who are being consulted. There also needs to be an awareness of the need to take these views into account, and the need to feedback to those consulted on what decisions have been taken and why. Examples of this include the consultation carried out on the Local Development Framework to develop the preferred options for development in the area, the tri-annual residents survey and the recent online surveys looking at recycling of plastics and dog control orders.
- **Involve** – This means working together to design, deliver or assess a service. This allows people to be fully involved in the agenda-setting and decision-making process, and includes agreeing together on future developments. Often this sort of engagement takes place through partnership activity or shared services, generally with voluntary and community groups. However it may also include the private sector, where there is a need to involve the business sector, or other public sector bodies where there is a benefit in terms of value for money and customer access.
- **Devolve** – This involves passing responsibility for a service to a community group. They are then able to plan and deliver that service in the way that best suits local people. This is seen by the government as the ideal form of engagement. The local government White Paper has set out more ways in which devolution of services will be possible, such as through the community ownership and management of a community centre or library.

Bringing these two definitions together,

Community Engagement is the proactive use and development of the energies, knowledge and skills of our communities and partners, to improve the quality of life for the people of North Lincolnshire. It is a genuinely two-way process, providing considerable opportunity for the public to influence decisions.

Community engagement therefore has a wide scope:

- In visioning the ambitions that the council, and our partners in the Local Strategic Partnership, are aiming to achieve.
- Developing new and innovative ways of engaging the people of North Lincolnshire to enable them to participate in decisions about policies and services that affect their lives.
- Developing and supporting the capacity of our communities so that they are fully equipped to play an active part in future developments.
- As part of the “best value” regime that places councils under a duty to inform, consult, involve and devolve.

Definition of Terms

Citizenship – Where local people have the knowledge, skills and sense of empowerment to play a meaningful role in local decision-making and service delivery. It involves working in partnership, in this instance often between the council and local residents, to make North Lincolnshire a better place to live and work.

Stakeholder – A stakeholder is a person, group or organisation who have an ownership or involvement in the service, function or activity. In the sense of community engagement, it is used to encompass all groups including communities of interest and place that have an interest in the well-being and future of North Lincolnshire. It can also include visitors to the area, local businesses and investors, other public sector bodies, voluntary organisations, elected members and council employees.

Inclusion – This refers to the need to ensure that all communities, including those that are hard to reach, are fully able to be play a meaningful part in community engagement. In the past, some communities and individuals have experienced social exclusion. This has been for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to: gender, ethnicity, religion, age, sexuality, physical or mental ability, financial status and caring responsibilities. In terms of community engagement, we recognise the need to be aware of hard to reach groups and that we need to do all that we can to ensure that everyone in North Lincolnshire is able to be part in our engagement activities.

Community Cohesion – A state of well -being that affects the harmony and stability of a given geographical community. This notion of community cohesion includes shared values, appreciating and valuing diversity and inclusion; integration (of different communities) and the sharing of similar life opportunities, in particular to areas such as housing, education and employment. It is about the dynamic relationships between, and within, communities. It incorporates, but goes beyond, the concept of race equality and social inclusion. In short, community cohesion lies at the heart of what makes a strong and safe community.

Why Do We Engage With Each Other?

Effective engagement requires effort and commitment, on both sides. There are many reasons why it is essential that we, as a council and local community leaders, take the time and effort to engage our communities. Whilst it is

certainly true to say we have a statutory commitment to engage those who live and work in North Lincolnshire, through the duty of Best Value as mentioned earlier, and in the preparation of the Sustainable Community Strategy, we are not satisfied with merely doing the minimum expected of us. Instead, we see the real value in delivering the services people want, in the manner they want them delivered. We believe in engagement because:

- It enables us to plan and provide services that are tailored to the needs of the local community. It stands to reason that the people who live and work in North Lincolnshire, who receive the services that the council provides, are best placed to tell us what affects them and what is needed to improve their quality of life. The council exists to provide the services that local people need and want, not to provide the services we assume local people want.
- If local people are able to effectively feed their views into planning the policies and strategies that will shape their area, they are much more likely to have pride in their area and a sense of ownership and responsibility over the services.
- Measuring service user and public satisfaction with our services is a crucial tool as a performance indicator, providing us with useful information on which to base future service developments.
- Higher levels of community engagement can lead to a reinvigoration of local democracy and a reversal of voter turnout trends. By engaging local people in our activities they are automatically becoming more actively involved in the democratic process, and engagement is itself a form of participatory democracy which some people may find more satisfactory than simply exercising their right to vote.
- Communicating with local people can help them gain a fuller understanding of what council services are available, what people can expect from the services and what constraints there are on council resources. This helps to more accurately manage people's expectations and may help lead to higher levels of satisfaction with the council amongst our residents.

Commitment to Our Communities

We are committed to supporting and developing our communities. To help guide this commitment, we have adopted the following values.

Open, honest and respectful community engagement should:

- *Be an integral part of all we do, with everyone sharing a genuine and sincere commitment to involving people in the council's business*
- *Lead to genuine balance and integrity in the way the conflicting views and interests are balanced and managed*
- *Make a positive difference, bringing tangible benefits to the council and the community*
- *Lead to real changes in the council's plans, policies and procedures*
- *Be conducted in terms and within values that are meaningful and relevant to all participants*
- *Strive to encourage people to engage at the highest possible level*
- *Be fair and inclusive providing an opportunity for all to participate*

How Do We Engage?

There are many ways in which we currently engage with our communities in North Lincolnshire. These are shown in the table below.

| <u>Method</u> | <u>Aim</u> |
|--|---|
| Direct magazine | To inform residents of council services and performance |
| Website news stories | |
| Press releases | |
| Local Links offices and Customer Call Centre | |
| Annual residents' survey | To inform the council of resident's views on council services and performance |
| Tri-annual satisfaction survey | |
| Comments, compliments and complaints procedure | |
| Service user panels | |
| Surveys done online or through Direct magazine | To consult residents on support for particular projects or initiatives |
| Focus groups | |
| Consultation on specific projects | |
| Public meetings | |
| Opportunities to attend council, cabinet & scrutiny meetings | To involve residents in the decision and policy making processes |
| Petitions | |
| Community Call for Action | |
| Community Forums – Young people, older people, disability, race, age, gender | |

Whilst we are already making progress in engaging our communities, we are always trying to seek out new and innovative methods of engagement. Also, we are keen to continue to extend our engagement activities as far as we can, thus allowing as many people as possible to participate the planning and delivery of local services.

Principles of Engagement

Community engagement activity is not always easy. It takes time and effort on both sides and needs clearly defined aims and parameters. To ensure that the engagement is as effective as possible, and carried out at as high a level as is possible, we have established a number of principles that we believe are necessary. These principles have been developed from our own experience here in North Lincolnshire, and from best practice around the country. Adherence to these principles should form a solid foundation for the development of future community engagement activity across North Lincolnshire.

- There must be clarity of purpose for the engagement activity. This purpose should be clearly communicated to those that are being engaged. There must also be a positive focus to engagement, stressing the value added through community participation. This is essential to ensure both our communities and staff are fully committed to the engagement process.
- The method(s) of engagement must be appropriate to the overall objective of the project and for the community with whom you wish to engage.
- Adequate time and resources must be allocated to the engagement activity. Engagement is not simply an 'add-on', it is full part of the decision making and service delivery process. Appropriate staff time and resources need to be embedded and recognised as a full part of the project planning process. The level of commitment required by those being engaged must also be considered and clearly communicated from the outset.
- There needs to be recognition that some communities experience social exclusion and require pro-active development to help them participate fully in the engagement process. This includes ensuring that engagement activities are as accessible as possible, both in terms of venues and times as well as providing information as clearly and concisely as possible.
- Our engagement activities should always avoid duplicating effort and repeating work already carried out. There should be clear levels of communication within the council to share information gathered through consultation and partnership working, both within the council and with our partners in the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), is strongly encouraged to help avoid 'consultation fatigue'.
- Engagement should always take place as early in the planning process as possible. This is important otherwise people may feel they are being consulted on decisions that have already been made or devolved powers that they did not want. Building trust between the council and our communities is essential. Only through building trust will our communities feel that their voice is being heard and therefore be more willing to take part in engagement activities.

- A culture of openness and honesty should be visible in the engagement process. The pros and cons of the different levels of engagement should be clear, and any decision not to take part in the engagement activity should be respected. What can and cannot be achieved or influenced, and the boundaries within which the council is operating should be made clear.
- There must be visible accountability and leadership of the project. A named member of staff, who has the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out the activity effectively, should be given responsibility for each engagement activity. Their name and contact details should be given to all participants as a point of contact, and someone to whom they can approach with any concerns.
- Those being consulted must have had access to, and enough time to understand, information that will help them to play an informed part in the engagement process. Where there may be barriers relating to communication, such as language or sensory impairment, these must be overcome.
- Feedback, on what decisions have been taken and why, is a crucial element to any engagement activity, especially where there were opposing views on what developments should take place. Clear and accurate information on when people can expect feedback should be provided at the beginning of the process, and should be delivered as promised.
- As with all council activities, there should be a consistent performance management approach to engagement. Activities should be reviewed and revised at appropriate stages that have been built into the engagement process, to ensure the continuous cycle of improvement.

Elected Members and Democratic Engagement

Elected members have a clear responsibility in championing the interests of the communities they represent. They have a key role in ensuring local services are responsive to the needs of their constituents and enabling local people's voices to be heard. They have a particularly important role in ensuring vulnerable people and those least able to speak out, for example children and young people, are given the support to do so. The key channels through which elected members are part of the engagement process are:

- Their unique relationship with residents
- Feedback from their involvement in local groups and partnerships
- Instigating and responding to engagement activities
- Through questions to council meetings and scrutiny committees

Relationship with Residents

Elected members have a unique relationship with their residents through their role as community leaders. Through the work they do within their communities, they are able to build a picture of the priorities of their residents. They are well positioned to recognise the diverse needs of their communities, including those of hard to reach groups. They can then ensure that the council priorities, plans and actions are informed by an understanding of these needs.

Additionally, elected members have a role in leading their communities. They are able to provide direction for their area, to mediate between and to help reconcile competing views and interests; and to encourage and aide people to resolve local problems themselves. They also act as advocates for their area, influencing decisions taken by the council and other public bodies, including on planning and licensing.

This is not forgetting that elected members are often local residents themselves. The issues that affect their constituents are the types of issues that also affect them, such as the quality of the local environment, the availability of council services in their area and provision of local public transport.

Involvement in Local Activities

Elected members are often involved in many local groups and partnerships. These activities help build guide their understanding of local priorities, as well as giving them an opportunity to exercise their role as community leaders. Examples of some of the groups elected members may be involved with include parish and town councils, residents' associations, the board of governors at educational facilities, attendance at local religious establishments and membership of the local chamber of commerce to name but a few.

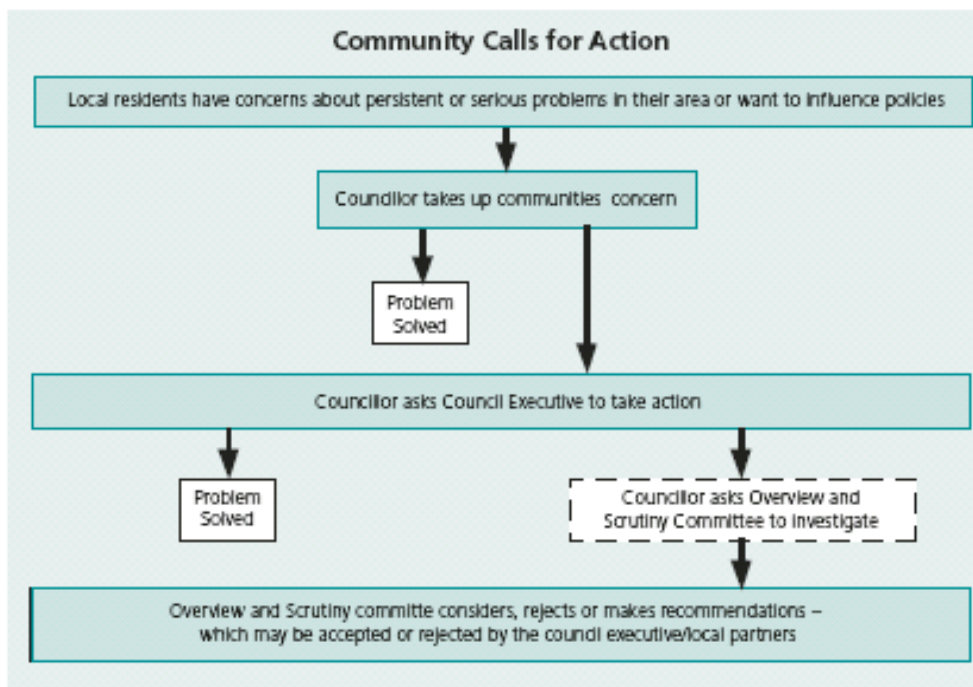
Instigating & Responding to Engagement Activities

Elected members are ideally places to instigate and respond to engagement activities. Some of the notable activities at their disposal are in calling public meetings, starting or responding to the opinions expressed in a petition and through the new Community Call for Action.

The council has a clear policy in how it deals with petitions and has a genuine interest in ensuring that local services meet the requirements of local people. Under the council's constitution a petition is defined as a written matter, containing a request, representation, complaint or objection, directed at the council and signed by 10 or more residents of North Lincolnshire. The petition is then brought to the attention of the cabinet member whose portfolio covers the subject of the petition. At the request of the petitioner, a meeting can be organised comprising of a group of up to 3 people to represent the petitioners; the appropriate cabinet member; the lead member; a member of the opposition group; relevant ward councillors; and the appropriate head of service. A report on the issues raised by the petition will be prepared by officers in advance of the meeting and one member of the petitioners group can address the panel for up to five minutes. Following the meeting, the cabinet member is responsible for responding to the issues raised by the petition in writing. They must write to the petitioner to inform them of the outcome of their petition, whether or not this is the outcome of the petitioners desired, and the reasons for this decision.

A Community Call for Action (CCfA) will provide a key link between local people and public service providers, with the elected councillors acting as the conduit of the link. From their correspondence and knowledge of their area and its people, councillors will identify issues which are of significant concern to the

communities they represent. They may decide that the wider community interest justifies a CCfA on a particular issue, including occasions when petitioners are unhappy with the council's response to their petition. When a CCfA is raised, the following process is followed:



Strong and Prosperous Communities: The Local Government White Paper, October 2006

Questions to Council Meetings

All meetings of the full council, cabinet and overview & scrutiny committees are generally held in public. Information on the dates, times and locations of these meetings can be found on the North Lincolnshire Council website or through our Local Links offices.

North Lincolnshire residents are invited to put forward questions to full council meetings and to overview & scrutiny panels. Residents can ask a question on any subject which is relevant to the body that they are addressing. The Chair of the meeting needs to be made aware that a question is going to be asked in advance of the meeting commencing. To arrange to ask a question, or for further guidance on the appropriate body to address a question to, contact the Democratic Services Manager.

Performance Management of Engagement

As with any properly managed function, engagement activity needs to have an appropriate performance management framework in place. In simple terms, it needs to follow the basic plan-do-review cycle:

Plan – the aims and intended outcomes; parameters within which the activity will take place; resource input by all parties; and logistics of the engagement activity will all be fully planned in advance. Following our principles of engagement as detailed earlier, this will include plans to engage hard-to-reach groups as well as how and when feedback will be given to stakeholders. The planning stage will also contain a risk analysis and details of the activity will be included on the community engagement database.

Do – the activity itself will follow the plans identically. If any unforeseen problems arise during the implementation of the activity, the original plans will be re-examined to ensure that the activity is still fit for purpose. Stakeholders will be kept fully informed of progress throughout the activity.

Review – At an appropriate period after the activity has begun, or once the activity has taken place, it will be fully evaluated to ensure that it has met the aims and outcomes as set out in the planning stage. The key questions that will be asked are:

- Were the objectives of the activity clearly understood by everyone?
- Were the right stakeholders and partners involved?
- Were the methods used appropriate to achieve the objectives?
- Were the levels of resources and support right?
- Was the timescale and process for the activity transparent?
- Was the timescale and process adhered to?
- Was the activity accessible and inclusive?
- Did the activity provide good value for money?
- What aspects of the activity went well and why?
- What improvements could be made to the activity in the future?
- What lessons can be learnt and shared from this activity?

Where does this Framework Fit?

This framework has been designed to be one of three resources available to all stakeholders who are part of the community engagement process. Details of the other two resources are provided below.

Planning Our Engagement Activities

Being clear about our engagement priorities is a key part of the council's strategic planning process. Documents such as the council's strategic plan, as well as the individual service plans, detail some of the developments in community engagement that will take place over the coming three years. These will then be drawn together into a Community Engagement Plan, published on our website, which will outline the council's plans for improving community engagement.

Along side the plan will be our community engagement database. This will list all the engagement activities that the council intends to organise. As well as helping avoid duplication of effort on the part of council services, this database will also provide residents with information on engagement projects that are coming up which they may be interested in being involved with. An up-to-date copy of the

database will also be regularly published on the website. Specific engagement activities will also be publicised through the local media and council publications.

Consultation Toolkit

There is a real need for any engagement activities carried out by the council, wither on our own or with our partners, to be to the highest standard possible. This helps to build trust between the council and the residents of North Lincolnshire, as well as leading to a more successful outcome that meets the needs of local people.

We are lucky enough to benefit from being the authors of a consultation toolkit that has been used as best practice across the country, and even in places as far away as New Zealand. Following the toolkit when planning any consultation activity allows us to ensure a consistent approach to engagement that is properly resourced, of a high standard and appropriately inclusive. It covers the key stages of activity as follows:

- Deciding who to consult with
- Deciding what to consult on
- Deciding how to consult
- Starting the consultation
- Evaluating and using the results