

North Tyneside Council Engagement Strategy 2012-2015

January 2012

1. Introduction

This Engagement Strategy sets out the Council vision for ensuring the active engagement of all across the whole of North Tyneside.

This document explains the purpose of the strategy and the context in which it has been developed. It puts forward definitions of 'engagement' and 'community', and describes the principles underpinning the strategy. Next it outlines why engagement is important to the effectiveness and efficiency of the Council, before considering how engagement is currently undertaken by North Tyneside Council and the improvements that can be made.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this strategy is to:

- ensure local people and organisations influence and help to shape the decisions that affect their lives
- meet the need for effective, efficient and co-ordinated engagement
- help the Council and its partners to understand the needs and issues of local communities.

1.2 The National Policy Context

Our strategy has been developed during difficult times. All councils face a tough financial challenge in light of the need to tackle the level of national debt. As a result we need to think differently about what we do and how we do it. We need to work with people to focus on the things that matter locally and help people take responsibility for improving their quality of life.

The role of local councils will change significantly in response to this agenda, with an increasing expectation that most councils act as commissioners which will reduce their role as providers of services. At the same time councils need to build community capacity by engaging and enabling communities to take more local control over the shaping and delivery of services. There is also an increasing focus on the personalisation of services and on developing a wider range of service models to stimulate choice and diversity. The Government also expects councils to establish stronger partnerships between public sector agencies to deliver a more seamless and cost-effective service to customers.

Councils need to be mindful of the Government's Best Value Statutory Guidance and the requirement that they comply with the following at all stages in the commissioning (including decommissioning) and delivery of services:

- **'the duty to consult** representatives of a wide range of local persons' (including representatives of council tax payers, those who use or are likely to

use services provided by the authority or have an interest in the area, local voluntary and groups and businesses)

- **equalities legislation** including giving 'due regard' to 'how different people will be affected by their activities, so that their policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people's needs'; and by being transparent and accountable to service users by publishing information about decision-making and the equality data that underpins them.

1.3 The Local context

North Tyneside Council's priorities are set out in North Tyneside Strategic Partnership's (NTSP) Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) (2010-13) and the draft Council Plan for 2012-16.

The SCS has four themes; two are of particular relevance to this draft Engagement Strategy:

Quality of Life – to provide opportunities for the borough's diverse communities to engage in public life through shaping the decisions that affect their lives and volunteering.

Sense of place - which involves residents and communities across the borough working with the council to make the most of their lives, providing them with opportunities to try new things, learn new skills and play their part in their communities.

The Council Plan builds on this with its emphasis on **helping people to make a positive contribution**. Key to this is the Big Society Programme, which:

- encourages and enables more individuals to get involved through giving time, effort or money
- supports citizens to take responsibility for their own neighbourhoods and work with the Council and its partners to improve society
- supports local voluntary and community organisations to build capacity
- enables local communities to shape and deliver local services.

The new reality of public service provision is also reflected in the priority of **making change happen** - improving customer service and facing up to our financial challenges.

Both are to be achieved through the Council's Change, Efficiency and Improvement Programme, which seeks to reform, re-define and re-shape services in order to meet the changing national policy context and local demands. This requires the Council to fundamentally change the way in which it delivers and commissions services. The programme has already begun to identify the core services the Council should provide, services the Council can share and services that can be delivered in partnership with local communities and private or voluntary sector agencies through partnerships, mutuals, co-operatives, joint venture companies and social enterprises. The

programme will define what outcomes local people should expect and show how social action can help to reduce demand.

The Council's 2011 Residents Survey has identified that 45% of people who completed the survey feel more informed about how to get involved in local decision making compared to 33% in 2008. In addition 35% agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area (an increase from 27% in 2008). However 65% disagree that they can influence decisions, showing that more needs to be done to engage residents in decision making processes.

Furthermore the Council's Engagement Framework and the NTSP's Partnership Engagement Strategy both need to be refreshed in order to help the Council meet the challenges outlined above.

2. Definitions and principles

2.1 Definitions

It is important to have a shared understanding of the terms 'community' and 'engagement'.

Community refers to a group of people that share:

- a common place - for example an individual neighbourhood, village, town or area
- a common interest - for example businesses or an interest in the environment, sport or social care
- a common identity - normally demographic characteristics for example age.

There are also individuals and groups with common needs. These could link with interests or geography, but are generally associated with particular service focus.

Engagement refers to a range of ongoing interactions which are appropriate for all participants. It may range from information giving to community action.

Figure 1: Types of Engagement



Engagement covers a wide spectrum that can involve large numbers of people or be focused on a few. Figure 1 illustrates the type of engagement that is included within this strategy.

2.2 Principles

In response to both national and local agenda and based upon the officer consultation and engagement through the Area Forums as well as a review of previous strategies, it is proposed that the following principles underpin the drive for improvement:

- **Improved co-ordination** – the Council will improve the co-ordination of engagement activity within the organisation and with key partners delivering services in North Tyneside.
- **A targeted consistent approach** – matching approach to the audience, subject and time with positive outcomes for everyone.

- **Supporting active involvement** – supporting residents, businesses, and community and voluntary groups to be actively involved in improving their communities.

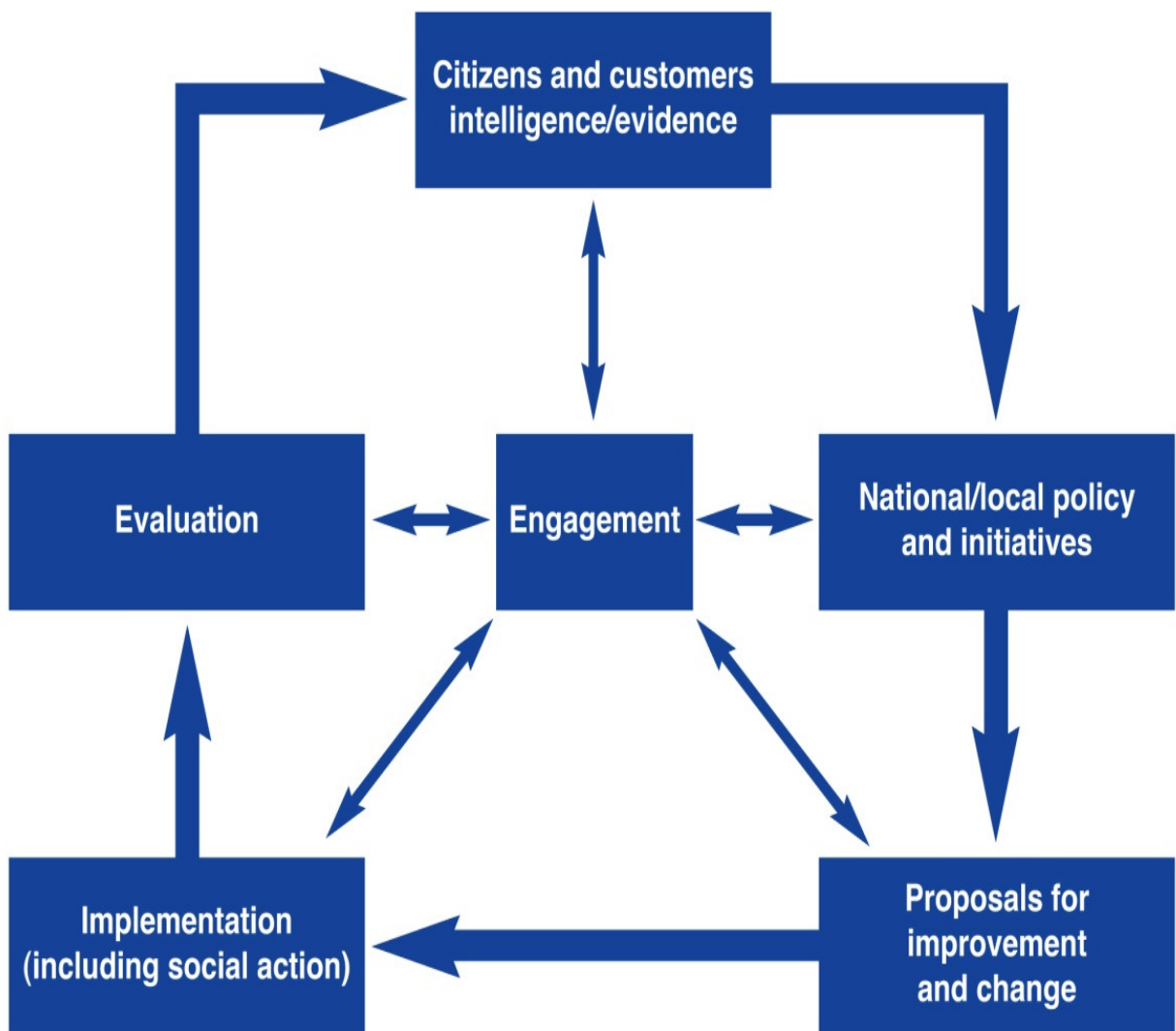
3. Why engagement is important

3.1 Well run engagement brings extensive benefits to the citizens and agencies involved.

The main benefits and examples of meaningful, coordinated and timely engagement includes:

- The **development, commissioning and delivery of more effective, and efficient services** and policies e.g. services that customers’ have shaped and which best meet their needs, helping providers to ‘get things right first time’ and avoid waste and duplication (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Continuous Improvement and engagement



- **Fulfilling statutory and legal requirements and protecting the reputation of the council** e.g. in relation to safe guarding, best value and equalities, and to ensure a robust response to any legal challenge.
- **Promoting the well-being of citizens** e.g. engagement about the development of a new play area, customer choice within the Decent Homes Programme, involvement in community safety initiatives.
- **Enabling engagement with our diverse communities**, e.g. through initiatives to build capacity within these communities to support increased involvement.
- **Removing barriers** (physical, language or social) to citizens accessing information or voicing needs or opinions through use of a range of appropriate and timely engagement methods.
- **Building social capacity** e.g. establishing new community groups, training and development for citizens and customers, involvement in decision making and service development, taking responsibility and ownership of a project, service or resource.
- **Working with councillors to enhance their local leadership role** e.g. via Area Housing Forums for Council Tenants and Area Forums, shared intelligence, the development of community projects and initiatives.
- **Building trust** and understanding between the Council and citizens e.g. sharing information and tough decisions with citizens and evidencing how citizen involvement has influenced decision making.
- **Ensuring effective and timely responses** to emerging community issues and concerns e.g. sharing intelligence between partners at Local Task and Co-ordination Groups (LTCG – these are meeting coordinated by the Police which take place in each locality).
- **Helping citizens to understand** the services and support available to them e.g. via road shows, exhibitions and information designed by and with customers.
- **Enhancing customer satisfaction and the reputation of the Council** by empowering residents and service users e.g. the development of North Tyneside Homes Service Development Groups and their scrutiny role.
- **Fostering a sense of community spirit and cohesion** through events and supporting social action.

3.2 Potential issues arising from community engagement

However, in addition to the benefits, many people involved in community engagement highlighted the potential challenges. Examples of these include:

- **Expectations** – if not done in a meaningful and transparent way engagement can raise expectations about the amount of influence citizens have.
- **Resource intensive** – well run engagement is often resource intensive.

- **Managing competing interests** – engagement will often expose diverse and competing interests. Managing how this is captured and reconciled can be a complex task.

4. Current engagement activity

Following an initial pro-forma based survey in August 2011, 30 officers from across the Council, all of whom spend time involved in community engagement, took part in a workshop to identify what community engagement means for the Council, and how we can improve on our current activities.

This consultation highlighted the range of engagement activity being undertaken by the Council and common issues in their delivery, these are outlined below.

4.1 The scope of current engagement activity

The consultation highlighted the range of people and groups the Council engages with (see Figure 3 for examples), the structures it uses (as shown in Figure 4) and the variety of engagement activities and approaches employed (outlined in Table 1).

Figure 3 Examples illustrating the diversity of people and groups engaged within North Tyneside

Young people	Tourists/visitors	Private landlords
Partners	Carers	Employees
Stakeholders	People with mental health issues	Councillors
Schools	Residents	Older people
Beach Users	Ethnic groups	Businesses
Disabled people	People with learning disabilities	Customers
Children	Looked after children	'Friends of' groups
Tenants and leaseholders	People in residential care	
Faith groups	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people	
Children in need	Allotment Users	

Figure 4: Examples of current engagement structures in North Tyneside

Youth Council	Housing Overview Panel
Older People's Engagement Network	Steering Groups
Working with Events	Project Boards
North Tyneside Strategic Partnership	Business Forums
Police and Communities Together	Council
NTH Service Development Groups	
Area Forums	Private Landlords Forum
Ward surgeries	Chambers of Trade
Older People's Voluntary Sector Forum	
Adult Social Care Provider Forums	
Commissioning Boards	Allotment Forum
Multi-agency Forums	LA Housing Area Forums

Many of these structures are run with or by key partners such as Northumbria Police, NHS North of Tyne, VODA, Age UK and other community and voluntary sector groups, Nexus, LINK, Job Centre Plus, GP Clinical Commissioners, and local businesses.

Table 1: Examples of current engagement approaches*

	Approaches
Informing	Widening Horizons and other council publications, cultural events and fun days, reports, web site, work clubs, press articles, surgeries, customer contact, Members Enquiries, marketing campaigns, posters, leaflets, texting, councillor newsletters.
Consulting	Residents Panel, Events (e.g. State of the Area,), focus groups, workshops, surveys (postal, electronic, telephone, face to face), polls, road shows and exhibitions, information stalls, drop-in sessions, estate walkabouts, consultation software (e.g. Limehouse), staff events, comment cards and feedback, e-mails, Members Briefings, e-consultation methods.

Involving	Community Learning Champions, scrutiny groups, mystery shopping, budget allocation.
Devolving Decisions	Housing Environmental Budgets, Roads and Pavements Improvement Budgets.
Building capacity/ supporting social action	Young Mayor and Youth Council, community planting days, conservation days, training (for citizens, customers and community organisations), grants and funding, Citizen-led, service design, development and delivery, local ambassadors and champions.

*Some of these could appear under more than one engagement type, but have been placed in whichever is the highest intensity of engagement (see Figure 1 page 4 for explanation)

More information on engagement processes and methods will be provided in the planned engagement tool kit.

4.2 Common issues in the delivery of engagement activity

The consultation with officers directly involved in engagement highlighted the following issues about delivering engagement activity in North Tyneside:

4.2.1 Co-ordination and intelligence

- Better co-ordination and information sharing (on, for example, contacts, engagement practice and plans) are required to make best use of resources.
- Deeper understanding of who the borough's 'hard to hear' groups are and a more co-ordinated approach to engaging with them is needed. In particular, engagement with faith groups is limited (generally engagement activity is failing to draw effectively upon the networks, services and social action undertaken by these groups) and engagement with lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender people should be further developed and strengthened.
- Integration of business engagement into a more co-ordinated approach.
- Better use should be made of the engagement, networking and intelligence gathering routinely undertaken by councillors.
- A common understanding of what engagement is needed so that officers see its relevance to their role.
- The need to enable all employees to log community issues and concerns in order to enhance community intelligence.
- Recognition that engagement must only be undertaken if there is a genuine opportunity for participants to influence decisions.

4.2.2 A targeted consistent approach to engagement

- Greater use of electronic methods of engagement and networking (with residents and partners) should be encouraged.

- Effective and timely feedback on engagement findings and outcomes should become standard practice or customers and citizens will not feel engaged and will become disillusioned.
- The capability of officers and councillors to engage effectively and confidently should be further developed.
- Those planning to engage should be able to seek the advice of existing 'engagement specialists' across the council.
- The need to engage a wider range of people and balance 'hearing the same voices over and over again' by using a wide range of appropriate engagement methods.

4.2.3 Supporting active involvement and capacity building

- Those undertaking engagement and decision-making should have a greater focus on empowerment and devolution.
- More capacity building in communities is needed.
- Engagement structures should be reviewed and rationalised to release more time to engage with citizens and deliver the council's Big Society objectives.
- Engagement grants and budgets (e.g. the various environmental budgets) should be co-ordinated and focus on capacity building and achievement of the Big Society.

5 Priorities for action

This Strategy has reviewed the national and local policy context, set out why engagement is important and identified the scope and current activity. The following section sets out the priority areas for action under the three key principles of:

- improving coordination,
- a targeted and consistent approach
- supporting active involvement.

5. 1 Priorities for action

.....Overarching theme: Effectiveness.....

Priority	Issue	Potential options
Co-ordination	1. Better co-ordination required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider use of the Engagement Forward Plan -a calendar of engagement activities and cultural events/festivals • Completing the Engagement Tracker - a web-based tool for enable information on planned, current and past engagement activity (including lessons learned) to be shared. • Creating and maintaining a Corporate Stakeholder List and map. • Exploring opportunities to share information on engagement participants using Customer Relationship Management (CRM). • Creating one portal for engagement to make online activity more accessible (e.g. not having to navigate to team/function pages in order to have your say on a particular issue). • Comprehensive list of residents/groups which is kept up-to-date
	2. More effective engagement with equalities groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-establishing the Getting Involved Project – which offered a co-ordinated approach to engagement with equalities groups and helped build the capacity of those groups to engage. • Re-focusing engagement activity on outreach and capacity building particularly with these groups.
	3. Creating intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better promotion and use of existing information and intelligence – checking (on the tracker and council date store) whether the information needed already exists before undertaking engagement. • Establishing virtual networks and information sharing amongst service providers in each area of the borough e.g. via a web-based Community of Practice or extranet capabilities via which alerts and requests for information could be sent and shared. • Exploring ways to encourage and enable all employees to log community issues and concerns. • Map Members Enquiries to highlight community issues and concerns.
	4. Role of Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the role councillors play in promoting and facilitating Area Forums and its community budgets. • Identify ways to integrate councillors’ community knowledge and intelligence into the proposed corporate systems.

A targeted consistent approach	5. Improved capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the review function for completed engagement activities within the Engagement Tracker to ensure good practice and learning from across North Tyneside are logged and shared. • Completion and promotion of the Engagement Toolkit (a guide to undertaking well planned, effective engagement). • Exploring and then using the most appropriate and effective e-engagement methods e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Encouraging regular feedback by creating a prototype site for engagement which focuses on two-way communication. ➢ Online polls ➢ Consulting on specific projects e.g. Forest Hall, where people could express their preference for particular elements without having to attend meetings. ➢ Developing extranet capabilities to create an online community where community groups can share their learning, projects, ideas, etc. • Enhancing Councillors engagement capability e.g. by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Reviewing and improving current engagement approaches e.g. surgeries ➢ Including engagement training in the induction programme for new councillors.
	6. Effective feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing the feedback loop through use of the engagement tracker and following the good practice contained in the engagement toolkit.
	7. Improved engagement with equalities groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening engagement equalities groups particularly religious groups and LGB and T communities. • Building capacity within our diverse communities to support their increased involvement in decision making and social action.
Supporting active involvement	8. Increasing resident and service users' capacity to engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrating engagement activity with the Big Society Programme and building on initiatives such as the training exchange. • Building on the capacity building work undertaken by North Tyneside Homes and Children, Young People and Learning Directorate. • Creating new partnerships with and accessing the networks associated with places of worship and housing associations
	9. Rationalising funding and structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing grants and budgets e.g. the various environmental budgets to build capacity and help achieve the Big Society. • Using grants to increase engagement with small community groups. • Reviewing and rationalising current engagement structures to free more time to building engagement networks.

All of the above must be underpinned by improved internal and external communication about engagement activity and support.

6. Next steps

The next steps in the development of the Engagement Strategy will be:

- Development of a draft action plan to accompany the strategy
- Consultation with officers who undertake engagement within the council
- Consideration by Senior Management Team
- Consultation with partners (for example Northumbria Police, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Services, Northumbria Healthcare Trust, NHS North of Tyne, GP Consortia, VODA, Age UK)
- Consultation with other stakeholders (including residents) via VODA, the council website, Area Forums, Residents Panel, etc.

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Sources:

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