

FOS

engaging citizens

engaging citizens

what is engagement?

Citizen engagement is about involving local people in deciding what is needed in your local area, and is all the more important in the context of the new flexibilities and freedoms now available to local authorities. The Concordat between central and local government signed in December 2007 recognises that 'powers are best exercised at the lowest effective and practical level', and that local authorities have 'a responsibility to do all they can to secure the social, economic and environmental well-being of their areas'. In doing so, local authorities are expected to 'conduct a growing share of the business of government.'

Better engagement with citizens is essential to ensure that local authorities make best use of these new powers, and to make the optimal trade-off between priorities and outcomes. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (Part 7 Section 138) places a duty on local authorities to involve representatives of local persons (for instance, residents, service users or community groups) in the exercise of their functions. The duty may include providing information, consulting or involving people in some other way. The duty to inform will be monitored under the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), and the draft Statutory Guidance is summarised below under 'National Context'.

'Understanding the needs of citizens, particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, is essential to delivering outcomes that matter to communities'

Focusing on Citizens, Users and Diverse Communities, Audit Commission, 2008

This paper focuses on service delivery, particularly where the services are provided jointly by more than one organisation, or in partnership. But engagement is more than just consultation on priorities or equalities schemes. It is also about increasing a sense of belonging, of ownership and responsibility to the local area. The more engaged local residents are, the more they are likely to respect and care for the local area.

there are different areas for engagement:

- service delivery – where service users (and potential service users) are involved in the design, delivery and management of services
- democratic engagement – ensuring that local citizens are involved in setting the agenda for the local area such as in selecting priorities for the LAA or drafting the Sustainable Community Strategy
- engagement in society – through skills development, often through engagement mechanisms themselves.

benefits of engagement:

- service delivery – ensuring services are timely and appropriate, meeting the needs of those that use them when they need to be met
- democratically – involvement in setting the local agenda increases a sense of ownership and responsibility
- society – increase in skills through engagement mechanisms can increase employment prospects and educational attainment, and reduce reliance on benefits, anti-social behaviour and crime.

national context

Under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007) which comes into force in 2009, authorities have a 'duty to inform, consult and involve'.

The duty applies to all best value authorities in England except police authorities. The duty requires authorities to take those steps they consider appropriate to involve representatives of local persons in the exercise of any of their functions, where they consider that it is appropriate to do so. It specifies the three ways of involving that need to be covered in this consideration:

- providing information about the exercise of the particular function
- consulting about the exercise of the particular function; and/or
- involving in another way

The duty to involve will be monitored under the CAA framework being developed. National Indicator 4 will measure the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality. Authorities should be able to demonstrate, through evidence gathered in the normal course of business, that:

- they understand the interests and requirements of the local community;
- they use their understanding to ensure information, consultation and involvement opportunities are provided
- they have a corporate approach to providing information, consulting and involving in other ways that flows throughout their organisation
- they work with partners where appropriate

- local people feel that the authority provides relevant and accessible engagement opportunities.

In addition, CLG's Empowerment White Paper: *Unlocking the Talent of Our Communities* emphasises government's commitment to giving local people more power over their lives, therefore helping to unlock talent, promote democratic and civic renewal, improve public services and encourage regeneration.

Many authorities have begun to develop their engagement capacities through their efforts to achieve the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) and associated schemes. The guidance on achieving ESLG through better engagement can be applied more broadly to help meet the new requirements of the Act.

Other relevant national policies, acts of parliament or legal requirements include:

- the Service Transformation Agreement, whose aim is to establish across the public sector a sustainable culture built upon an understanding of the needs and behaviours of citizens and businesses to create services that are better for customers, staff and taxpayers
- Neighbourhood Management Strategy
- Gender Equality Duty, Disability Equality Duty, and Race Equality Duty – all from different acts of Parliament but which require consultation or involvement in their implementation. Guidance is available on the Equality and Human Rights Commission website
- Sustainable Community Strategies – Involving citizens and voluntary sector organisations in developing the sustainable community strategy, through the Local Strategic Partnership.

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- NHS & Community Care Act (1990) – user involvement incorporated
- 1986 Disabled Persons (Services Consultation and Representation) Act – Required local authorities to include representatives of user-led organisations in the planning and formulation of locally run services for disabled people.

local success and benefits

from a service delivery perspective citizen engagement can deliver:

better targeted interventions, processes and outcomes

In Leeds, the Disabled People's Strategic Partnership and Service Development Board (SPSDB) (a multi-agency body including health, social care, housing, the voluntary sector and disabled people's groups) established the Disability Reference Group to be part of the decision making process. This group of disabled people (with a range of impairments, employment and service user experience) works alongside (and representatives sit on) the SPSDB to help ensure that its work addresses the priorities of disabled people in Leeds. The DRG highlighted problems experienced as a result of delays in the installation of minor adaptations to people's homes (such as grab rails or ramps). It helped the SPSDB identify that the delays were caused by the requirement to have a full assessment at a particular level of spending, coupled with high demand on the staff carrying out assessments. By raising the threshold at which an assessment was required, the backlog was quickly cleared and minor adaptations could be installed within a

few days of the initial request, rather than several months later by which time the needs of the individual had often changed. This speeded the delivery of simple adaptations, freed-up staff time to do more complex work, and increased the quality of life and independence for disabled people.

A voluntary sector organisation (Leeds Involvement Project) manages the reference group thus maintaining its independence, while allowing it to be fully supported.

The London Borough of Haringey identified that the local Orthodox Jewish community, despite growing in numbers, was making very little use of services and remained the hardest to reach group in the Borough. As well as doing a lot of project work with the community to ensure its needs are addressed through mainstream services, the authority has also established a new Children's Centre (in collaboration with the London Borough of Hackney) and provided new stock and professional support for an orthodox library based in a resident's home. Spin-offs have included parent and toddler groups, benefits advice and commissioned youth provision. The Haringey Young People's Panel is inviting a youth representative from the orthodox community to contribute to its work.

The London Borough of Croydon's commissioning framework was developed in partnership with the voluntary and community sector. Feedback from service users and communities is considered an essential part of the process:

'Involvement at the outset helps to improve effectiveness further down the line by ensuring that the services being commissioned are ones which address genuine needs in ways that are tailored appropriately to the range of potential service users.'

(from Croydon's Commissioning Framework, Beacon Authority Case Study 2007 – 2008)

The London Borough of Haringey's Area Assemblies are chaired by a ward councillor who act as champions and advocates for their communities. They link community expectations for involvement to Members' commitments to accountability. They built on existing good community links such as those involved with SRB projects. Proposing and voting on community projects promotes participatory budgeting.

more responsive organisations

London Borough of Haringey have developed local area assemblies which inform service planning and improvement. They have an explicit brief 'to engage people and broker service improvements'. This has been mirrored and improved by the Police Safer Neighbourhood Teams using the Council's neighbourhood framework to maximise joint working for area based service planning.

This is a wide-reaching development helping to ensure that the council's work reflects the experiences of local service users (or potential service users).

from a democratic perspective, citizen engagement can deliver:

greater sense of control over services and accountability

London Borough of Haringey's Area Assemblies allow local people to take decisions to influence the services delivered in their neighbourhood. They have the specific intention of aligning service planning and accountability in their area. They are formal council bodies and link community expectations for involvement to Members' commitment to accountability.

The local management committees in North Lincolnshire's Fresh Start project decides which areas to prioritise for their locality, designing the choice and delivery method of services.

greater sense of ownership of assets

Chorley Borough Council has handed over the management of the community centre in one of its most deprived wards to the community. This links into their work on community cohesion

The citizens living near North Somerset's For All Healthy Living Centre have dispelled the myths that it would be vandalised or defaced soon after opening. They were involved in its design and planning and it is locally managed and firmly rooted in the local area.

from a community development perspective citizen engagement can deliver:

building the capabilities of local people

Haringey's Youth Opportunity Fund offers grants to groups of and working with young people. Applications to the fund are decided by a Young People's Panel and must be written by young people.

building the skills of local people

The London Borough of Croydon's Supplementary Education Project develops the skills of local people, enabling them to be more engaged with society. It offers educational support for 150 children and over 1000 adults. It provides educational classes (such as Maths, English, basic skills and ESOL), skills classes (such as ICT and CV workshops), and life skills (such as drug, alcohol and gun crime awareness). There are also mentoring programmes and projects to raise self esteem and increase aspirations. This improves the life chances of disaffected people in Croydon and can lead to improved employment prospects.

By commissioning the voluntary sector to provide this support, the council is able to engage those citizens who have lost out or may lose out on mainstreams educational opportunities:

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‘we are able to take our ideas and the communities’ views directly to people who matter. We help the council to achieve its educational targets by getting the communities to support these goals. We are the bridge between the community – what’s going on with disaffected people – and the council’

(Sasha Rhoden, Project Director, Croydon Supplementary Education Project)

enhancing the ability for people involved to apply skills elsewhere

Talk2Croydon, which is provided by the voluntary organisation Croydon Voluntary Action and supported by the council and the health sector, is a web based tool to encourage community involvement in decision making. Focus groups were established in specific areas to increase service user involvement in the design, management and marketing of the web based engagement forum.

Those involved in the focus groups gained skills in web design, procurement, marketing and promotion. These are transferable skills which could help to improve employment prospects.

Croydon Neighbourhood Care Association supports and develops local neighbourhood care schemes across the Borough. It provides a range of umbrella support services for its members, including a training programme structured around the needs of member groups. Training is provided for staff and volunteers, ranging from food hygiene, first aid and manual handling to skills for supporting Blind people. An added benefit of this training is improved skills and employability for volunteers.

how do you engage?

Engagement can range from simply informing citizens about community events to empowering them to make decisions and direct resources to address particular problems.

The following examples of engagement illustrate the model outlined by David Wilcox. For a short summary of Wilcox’ model, see appendix A [<http://www.designingforcivilsociety.org/2007/10/engagement-isnt.html>].

inform

Local authority websites, magazines and newsletters to tell citizens what is happening in their local area and what services are provided.

consult

An example of consultation would be making plans for proposed changes in services, and then offering the public the chance to indicate which of the offered options they would prefer.

involve

An example of involvement is to engage citizens in the planning stage, to identify what the possible options might be. This might be through appointing some people to be on the decision making body, or having a standing advisory group or ensuring that representative community groups and voluntary organisations are part of the process of deciding what the options might be, as well as what the final decision is.

The Cotmanhay Breakfast Club is for children at Cotmanhay school. It has a membership of over 200 pupils, with more than 80 children attending daily. The club has increased attendance and punctuality at school, and staff report a marked improvement in levels of alertness amongst those who have attended the breakfast club. This project has been mainstreamed to continue post CNMG funding.

collaborate

In Leeds, the Disabled People's Strategic Partnership and Development Board (SPSDB) (a multi-agency body including health, social care, voluntary sector, housing and disabled people's organisations), established the Disability Reference Group (DRG) comprising disabled people to inform its work and help ensure that services provided to support disabled people are appropriate.

empower

The Cotmanhay Neighbourhood Management Group (CNMG) is part of the National Neighbourhood Management Strategy designed to reduce inequalities in living standards across the country. Cotmanhay is an area of Erewash Borough Council with high levels of health, housing, recreational and educational need. Board Members comprise residents (including two young people), service providers from voluntary and public sector organisations including the Police, Connexions, Community Concern Erewash, the Erewash Partnership and non-voting advisory members from Job Centre Plus, the Fire Service and the District and County Councils (including Councillors).

Its aim is to 'to help the community of Cotmanhay to improve services such as health, education the environment and reduce crime and by doing so improve the quality of life for and expectations of the community' (from their website homepage). Priorities for 2008–09 have been set for three areas, Domestic Violence, Antisocial Behaviour and activities for the pre-NEET group. Projects to address these issues will be commissioned through working theme groups made up of relevant service providers and residents.

The Board has given grants to projects that directly benefit the deprived area of Cotmanhay. These include: a family day to help inform regeneration plans; renovating the infant school's library; construction training for the unemployed; computers for the local Junior School; a music suite for Bennerly School; support for the Credit Union; a community sports coach; a young peoples drop-in centre; a pilot project to improve fitness and healthy eating among children in the area; and appointing Police and Community Support Officers.

below: Recruitment poster for Nottingham Local Access Forum, attached to a gate post in a country park popular with walkers, riders, duck-feeders and dog-walkers



engaging citizens

summary

Wilcox' work builds on that of Sherry Arnstein – her 'ladder of participation' illustrates the different levels of engagement. The higher up the ladder, the more involved citizens are, and the more ownership is felt of the service or policies of the authority:

Authorities need to think about where they are on the ladder when planning their engagement. Sharing decision making with citizens is 'partnership' in this model. Some of this work has already been started through local strategic partnerships, where voluntary and community organisations join statutory organisations to work together for the local area.

In some areas, there is experience of delegated power as well as partnership (such as Cotmanhay Neighbourhood Management Group or Haringey's Area Assemblies).

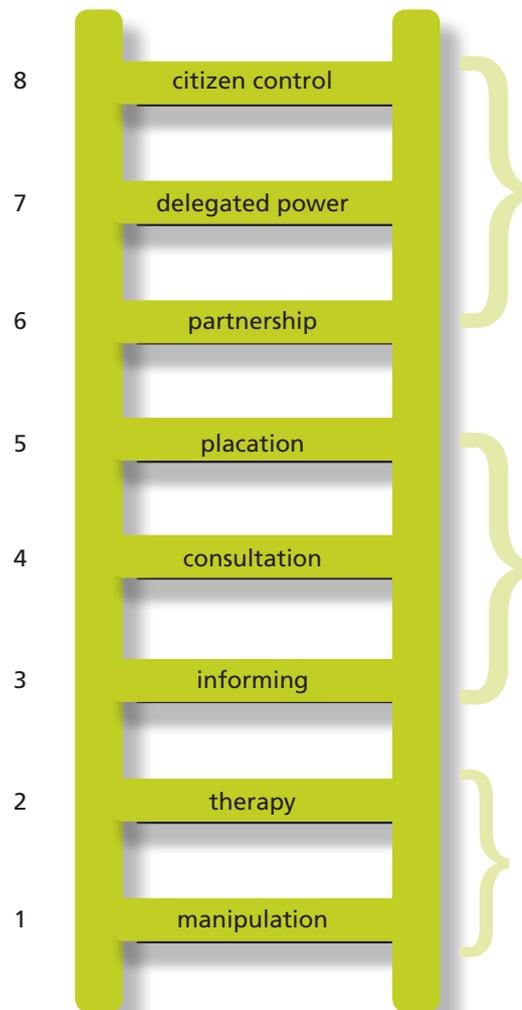
overcoming barriers and challenges

engaging the right people

How can you ensure that engagement is with the right people? Instead of recruiting members to advisory or consultation groups just by leaflets in shop windows or letter boxes, posters placed at strategic points in the community can target just the people you want to reach.

The poster opposite was on a gate post in one of Nottingham City Council's country parks. It invites new members to Nottingham Local Access Forum. By placing it outside in the country park, the council and other agencies that are

the ladder of participation



involved in access are more likely to attract members who are interested in using the outdoor facilities on offer. Decisions made by this body will be informed by people with an interest in the issues, rather than using a generic survey sampled across the whole local population.

Croydon's Community Network co-ordinates participation of different communities and the voluntary sector in the local strategic partnership. The network has approx. 350 members with 15 linked networks enabling the interests

of some of Croydon's under-represented groups to influence the local agenda.

The Community Involvement Manager at Croydon Voluntary Action (which hosts the Network) explains:

'In March 2007, we focused on creating a more equal and inclusive Croydon and invited some of the linked groups to present their views on gender, sexuality, disability, age and race. This stimulated discussion which led to priority action on the five key areas. These fed directly through to the CSP [Croydon Strategic Partnership] which have now been fed into Croydon's Community Strategy. One of the key things that came out of this was that the Community Network agreed that it wanted a new themed partnership which would focus on equalities issues to tackle inequality in the borough. The Chief Executives' Group of the CSP has taken this forward as an option for the future of equalities for the borough.'

finding the right tools

Successful engagement uses a variety of methods (see above), targeted and well planned. This ensures reaching a variety of citizens, and not just those that can be reached by, for example, a web survey or a public meeting.

At social events, such as at a tea dance, North Lincolnshire's Fresh Start project ensures that staff are on hand to talk to, who can then sign post people to services that are appropriate (such as home fire risk

assessments, falls advice clinics or basic health checks). This engages people in advance of the need for a service and is therefore effective in reducing higher cost interventions (such as emergency hospital treatment after a fire or a fall).

Chorley Borough Council uses a variety of methods in order to reach a wide range of people:

- citizens' panels
- listening days
- community forums
- engagement in overview and scrutiny enquiries
- website surveys
- postal questionnaires
- phone surveys

They also target specific groups such as young people or disabled people.

finding the right structure

North Lincolnshire's Fresh Start service delivers services to older people. The services are selected by a number of local management committees comprising older people. In Brigg and District, the first management committee, 12 over 50s are members of the committee. The whole project is overseen by an advisory group comprising mostly older people, as well as officers and professionals from the different partner organisations. Older people (service users and potential service users) therefore have the majority of the decision making power. This structure provides a sense of ownership about the project, demonstrated by proactive advocacy on behalf of the project by those who are involved.

The Croydon Compact includes a number of Community Involvement Commitments. This is an agreed set of principles and

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standards to enable all local people and groups to be active in local decisions. The Primary Care Trust, the Council, Croydon Voluntary Action and Croydon Community Network have signed up to these commitments and include:

- Involving Croydon people (including making community involvement a priority in planning, design, delivery and evaluation of new and existing activity)
- supporting people to be involved (including providing financial support to ensure that people are not 'out of pocket' when participating)
- taking positive action to involve people (includes targeting opportunities for involvement activity appropriately and respectfully to ensure that they reach the most challenging to reach groups)
- providing feedback (which includes a commitment to tell all people involved how their involvement has influenced decisions as soon as possible).

finding the right local partners

Some local authorities may have little or no experience of engaging citizens in mainstream activity. There is often a strong voluntary sector organisation that can lead on community engagement, and many local authorities have commissioned voluntary or community organisations to lead on engagement in partnership with the authority. Croydon Voluntary Action is a good example. It hosts or administers examples used in this briefing paper, such as the Community Network and Talk2Croydon.

Often it is more appropriate to commission a voluntary sector organisation to develop engagement locally. Leeds Involvement Project co-ordinates the involvement of disabled people, older people, and

many other groups, who then work in partnership with local authorities and other public sector organisations to ensure that policies, procedures and services are delivered that are appropriate to those groups.

Croydon's Commissioning Framework was developed in partnership with the voluntary and community sector, which has strong links with Croydon's diverse communities.

finding the right resources

Involvement needs to be sustainable in order to be effective. Sharing the costs with partners in the local area can help with this. North Lincolnshire Council worked in partnership with the PCT and Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire to establish local older people's fora which co-ordinate and focus the efforts and inputs of service providers around genuine customer/user need.

making the business case

The services Fresh Start (in North Lincolnshire) provides are designed and delivered at neighbourhood level as a result of local older people's fora. This increases the impact and relevance (local services for local need) and effectiveness (lower 'Did Not Attend' (DNA) rates). It also reduces public sector costs by keeping older people active and healthy with a high quality of life for longer, thus reducing demand on high dependency and high costs services such as residential care homes and preventable NHS treatment.

Some of the benefits might be challenging to quantify as there is a strong element of prevention in this work. Involving service users (and potential service users) in the

design and delivery of services, and using a variety of methods to engage them often prevents potentially costly situations. For example, installing minor adaptations reduces the number of falls, and therefore the likely cost of high cost emergency health care. Creating a single assessment process (like Rushcliffe First Contact) can trigger the installation of various safety features (such as servicing a boiler or installing a smoke detector) which can reduce illness and dependency on high cost health care or dangerous fires as well as improve the quality of life for the citizen.

Cost savings for both the council and their partners, can be more easily made when the authority share the costs of a service (such as a community hub where different related services are provided in the same building as in North Somerset) making it easier for the customer to access the services and information they need in the one place as well as reducing duplication and overheads for the partner organisations.

overcoming 'consultation fatigue' or 'citizen cynicism'

Working with other public authorities to share the risks and mitigate the chance of people feeling like the actions are tokenistic or meaningless. Act on a win-win quickly to demonstrate commitment; often there is something that could easily (and cheaply) be done to demonstrate commitment which will help to encourage people to participate more in the future. Consultation fatigue can be real, and shouldn't be underestimated; you may have to work to overcome the cynicism.

The London Borough of Croydon's Children's Fund is administered by Croydon Voluntary Action and offers funds

to projects to enhance social inclusion for young people. Children and young people are engaged in influencing how the money is spent, and they have been able to see direct benefits, such as the Croydon Community Bus. This double decker bus provides educational and recreational facilities to young people aged 8–13. It is an opportunity for children to meet, socialise and learn with their peers in their neighbourhoods and includes arts & crafts, board games, computer games, and outdoor activities such as football, hockey and cricket. Provision is led by the requirements of the young people and answers a clear need: 'before the bus there was nothing to do' (comment from a child using the community bus).

involving councillors

It is important that councillors are included in the engagement processes. They are, after all, the democratically elected representatives in their area.

Chorley Borough Council is involved in 'Lancashire Locals', where Committees of county and district councils are conducted in public. The general public can attend and speak on matters on the agenda. This makes the councillors more accessible and committee decisions more transparent.

engaging citizens

conclusions and recommendations

Below is a summary of key points and tips for engaging citizens:

- talk to your equalities department – they have been working on this concept for many years and should be able to help you roll this out across the authority
- keep in mind the goals – improving outcomes. Better engagement with citizens can help to improve both the customer experience and help to identify potential efficiency savings
- what's in it for the people you involve? Why should they give up their time to take part in your involvement activities? You must be able to demonstrate the benefits to them. Give customers feedback, for instance **'you said it, we did it'** publicity
- remember many other authorities have already done good work in this area, as has your authority! Share information, where possible and learn from each other. You could develop a consultation and involvement strategy with other partners
- citizen engagement is about knowing who your customers are (service-users and potential service-users) and ensuring that they are involved in the design delivery and management of services
- when done well, at the right time and with the right investment, it will help you reach your efficiency savings targets as you will be more able to deliver services that are better targeted to meet the needs of citizens and businesses in your area. By working closely with local partners you can identify efficiency savings by reducing duplication as well as by sharing resources and assets
- engagement is not a one off exercise – it needs to be ongoing in order to be fully effective. A variety of methods is key to reaching and engaging a variety of people. You need to ensure you are engaging the right people at the right time. Don't make assumptions! Postal Surveys are not always the best way to reach people – they tend to have a very low return rate
- good information is the heart of good engagement. This means monitoring your services, and sharing that information with your citizens. It means using data sources (such as Area Profiles from the Audit Commission, or Experian's Mosaic data programme) and targeting your work
- although there is likely to be an significant investment at the start in order to ensure that you are engaging with representatives of local people, and sharing as much information as is necessary with them, ongoing costs are usually a fraction of the initial costs
- don't forget to ensure that special needs groups need to be involved in authority-wide engagement and not just consulted on special needs. They are citizens who work, live, play and vote in your authority.



The Local Government Association is the national voice for more than 500 local authorities in England and Wales. The LGA group comprises the LGA and four partner organisations which work together to support, promote and improve local government.



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