

Subject: Rossendale Community
Involvement and Engagement Strategy and
Toolkit

Status: For Publication

Report to: The Cabinet

Date: 15th November 2006

Report of: Head of Community and Partnerships.

Portfolio

Holder: Community and Partnerships

Key Decision: Yes

X

Forward Plan

General Exception

Special Urgency

“X” In

Relevant Box

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to ask members to adopt and endorse the Community Involvement and Engagement Strategy and Toolkit which has been developed on our behalf by REAL.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 2.1 The matters discussed in this report are linked to and support the following corporate priorities:
Embedding our Customers Promise (Customers)

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS (j)

Either

- 3.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:
- Failure to engage members of the community with the activities of the Council and its partners could be seriously detrimental to our ability to improve and deliver against the Corporate Improvement Plan and the Community Strategy
 - There are no risks associated with adopting this strategic approach.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

4.1 What is Community Involvement and Engagement?

Community Involvement and Engagement is a term covering the different dialogues and activities carried out with and between the people that make up communities within an area, and the local authority.

4.2 Why is it important?

Communities can mean different things to different people. For those who carry responsibility for public services, engaging with the community means ensuring that everyone in their local area is given the opportunity to comment on the services provided for them and on the organisation's priorities.

It also means involving them in major decisions that will improve their quality of life. This is meant to be a two-way process, with organisations benefiting from the imagination and energy of local citizens. Community engagement can involve individuals, voluntary and community organisations and public sector bodies working together to address local issues.

4.3 Principles of Community Involvement and Engagement

Successful Community Involvement and Engagement is founded on a number of principles:

- √ Fairness, equality and inclusion must underpin all aspects of community engagement, and should be reflected in both community engagement policies and the way that everyone involved participates. Community engagement should have clear and agreed purposes, and methods that achieve these purposes.
- √ Improving the quality of community engagement requires commitment to learning from experience.
- √ Skill must be exercised in order to build communities, to ensure practise of equalities principles, to share ownership of the agenda, and to enable all viewpoints to be reflected.
- √ As all parties to community engagement possess knowledge based on study, experience, observation and reflection, effective engagement processes will share and use that knowledge.
- √ All participants should be given the opportunity to build on their knowledge and skills.
- √ Accurate, timely information is crucial for effective engagement.

4.4 Components of Involvement and Engagement

Involvement and engagement can take a number of different forms, generally expressed as a ladder.



4.5 Political and Legal Context

There is a growing understanding of the limitations of government's ability to drive change in public services, regeneration of disadvantaged areas and reinvigoration of local governance solely through traditional decision-making structures. Active citizenship at neighbourhood and local level is an essential complement.

The White Paper 'Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People' (DETR 1998) mapped out an agenda for the reform and modernisation of local government in England. This focuses on improving local services through best value, on councils listening to and building up their communities and on introducing a new role for councils to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of their area. The latter emphasised the need for councils to work with other public, private and voluntary organisations and with local people.

The Local Government Act 2000 places a duty on local authorities to prepare 'community strategies' for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well being of their areas, and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK. Our community strategy is Rossendale Alive.

The related guidance 'Preparing Community Strategies' (DETR 2000) sets out the principles, which should underpin all community strategies. These again emphasise the importance of engaging and involving local communities.

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 sets out Government policy for ensuring that land-use planning is founded in the aspirations of the community. A key aspect of the reforms are Statements of Community Involvement. These will be key mechanisms to ensure that communities are fully involved in the preparation of Local Development Frameworks.

Local authorities are now obliged under the Equality Standard for Local Government to consult on how their policies and decisions affect different groups.

Rossendale Borough Council has prioritised customer services and community within its corporate improvement plan for the forthcoming year. The Council leadership is committed to improving and sees effective Community Involvement and Engagement as a key part of the Council improvement process.

By local authorities and local politicians getting closer to the people they serve people can re-engage with local politicians and politics and with each other: buying into and thereby helping economic and social regeneration, challenging and improving service delivery, and tackling otherwise intractable problems of today and tomorrow such as climate change, demography and diversity, and social cohesion.

Good quality community engagement leads to:

- local people more actively engaged in shaping the future of their communities, with more influence over local services and action, and a greater capacity to tackle local issues for themselves;
- services that are more easily accessible, joined up and responsive to the distinctive needs of different communities and neighbourhoods;
- power devolved to bring decision-making closer to communities by strengthening the power of local councillors to act as advocates and leaders of the communities that they represent.

4.6 The Process

The Council appointed the Community Network and a consultant Rick Gwilt to carry out a review of the current and recent practices around engagement and involvement carried out by the Council and its partners.

This involved carrying out reviewing specific consultations, activities of the council and its partners and focus groups looking at how local communities would like to be engaged.

From these comments a strategy and tool kit has been drawn up and these are attached for members consideration.

5. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF FINANCIAL SERVICES (l)

5.1 N/A

6. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES (m)

6.1 N/A

7. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES (n)

7.1 N/A

8. CONCLUSION (o)

By having a clear strategic approach to community engagement Rossendale Borough Council is will be able to provide better services and empower local communities. The attached strategy has been rigorously developed on behalf of the council by the experts in the community – the community themselves.

9. RECOMMENDATION(S) (p)

9.1 That the strategy is adopted by the Council.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT (q)

10.1 Community network, Communities of Rossendale, members, officers, managers of the council, partners form Manchester City Council and Salford City Council.

(r)

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Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Getting Closer to Communities – Round 6 Beacon Scheme Theme Guide ▪ Listen Up – Audit Commission ▪ The Consultation Charter – Consultation Institute ▪ Customer Focus and Community Engagement – The Improvement Network ▪ National Standards for Community Engagement – Scottish Executive ▪ Closer to People – LGA/I&DeA ▪ Report on Community Involvement and Engagement by REAL and Rick Gwilt September 2006 	<p> http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk http://www.consultationinstitute.org http://www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk http://www.lga.gov.uk/ </p> <p>Communities and Partnerships Office</p>

Rossendale Community Engagement Strategy

1. What do we mean by Community Engagement?

Community engagement is a way of seeing our relationship, as a Council, with the people of Rossendale. It is a way of ensuring that we are on good talking terms!

Community engagement is a way for us to think about the nature of Rossendale – as not just a single community of all the people in “the valley”, but also a community made up of lots of different communities, for example:

- people in a particular neighbourhood, such as Weir or Stubbins or Facit;
- particular sections of the community, such as young people, older people, people of Asian heritage;
- people with a specific interest, such as health or transport or outdoor activity.

Community engagement is a way for us to think about the ways in which we interact with those local communities, not just by delivering Council services, but also by:

- keeping people informed;
- listening to people’s views;
- acting on what people tell us;
- giving people feedback on what we have done;
- Explaining what can and cannot be done and why
- keeping people informed about our services and our plans for the future;
- involving people directly in joint decision-making about services and activities;
- involving people directly in doing practical work together;
- supporting local voluntary and community groups in organising community activities and delivering public services.

We need to make use of the full range of these engagement activities, choosing the ones that best fit our purpose, and avoiding doing things for the sake of it, such as calling unnecessary meetings.

So community engagement will sometimes be about formal processes such as consultations and publications, but it will also be about a much more informal readiness to listen and to learn.

We need to check that people know and understand what we’re doing – and that it’s working.

We need to make sure we’re focused on the right things.

We need to try to ensure that our communities have the resources needed for them to play their part.

We need to get Council officers, elected members and the community working together to ensure that this approach to make a lasting difference.

We believe that the more effectively communities are engaged in shaping services, the more likely it is that quality will be delivered.

2. How Do We See it Working?

Our Vision of successful community engagement in Rossendale is one where:

- 2.1 The Council and its partners in the public sector and in the voluntary, community and faith sector work together effectively in the best interests of all the people of Rossendale.
- 2.2 The people of Rossendale are well informed and have a good understanding of the policies and activities of the Council and its partners.
- 2.3 The Council makes use of a wide spectrum of engagement methods from information giving and consultation, through partnership working, to support for community initiatives.
- 2.4 When consulting, the Council listens effectively to the views of the community, takes action wherever possible in response to those views, and informs the community effectively and promptly as to what has been done. We will acknowledge the views of local people and where it is not possible to deliver what people want we will explain the reasons clearly.
- 2.5 The Council and its partners treat individual residents as valued customers, seeking to understand their changing needs and to develop and improve services to meet those needs.
- 2.6 Community members are able to be involved in a range of activities and through joint working are able to help plan and influence Council activities and services either as individuals or through their involvement in community, faith and voluntary organisations.
- 2.7 Public services are delivered by a range of agencies, including voluntary, community and faith organisations.
- 2.8 The Council invests in building the capacity of the voluntary and community sector, through support from officers and elected members, grants and contracts, information and training and through its support for effective local infrastructure organisations.
- 2.9 The Council seeks to deliver access to high quality services which do not discriminate against people with different needs.

3 The Principles

Rossendale's approach to community involvement and engagement will be:

- 3.1 **tailored** to the specific local needs and experiences of Rossendale – for example, if people's sense of community is very localised, then where appropriate we need to recognise and build on that as well as encouraging people to engage at the Borough level and beyond;
- 3.2 **multi-layered**, covering all levels of engagement from information-giving to community empowerment – engagement is not just about consultation;
- 3.3 **purposeful**, ensuring that engagement takes place for a clear purpose – we need to be aware not just of what has prompted the exercise but also of what we are trying to achieve;
- 3.4 **selective**, ensuring that engagement methods are selected which are fit for purpose, and that people are not consulted excessively or unnecessarily;
- 3.5 **proactive** – seeking to engage with people where we find them as well as engaging with people who come to the Council.
- 3.6 reciprocal, with **feedback** to the community receiving as much attention as the gathering of information from the community;
- 3.7 **open and transparent**, with **accurate and timely** provision of information, and attention paid to the use of clear language.
- 3.8 fair, **inclusive** and accessible, with attention paid to the specific barriers faced by different groups within the community;
- 3.9 based on, and giving encouragement to, **learning from experience** and shared knowledge;
- 3.10 **co-ordinated** across departments and partner agencies, ensuring that knowledge and learning are pooled, that the maximum use is made of information gathered, and that duplication is avoided;
- 3.11 **monitored** for quality to ensure minimum standards are maintained.