DARLINGTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Community Engagement: A Bigger Say and a Better Deal for Our Communities

اگر آپ کو یہ کتابچہ انگریزی کے علاوہ کسی دوسری زبان میں درکار ہوتو براۓ مہربانی ٹیلیفون نمبر 01325 388017 پر فون کر کے حوالہ نمبر بتائیں۔

ਜੇ ਇਹ ਪਰਚਾ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਤੋਂ ਬਿਨਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਨੰਬਰ 01325 388017 'ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਅਤੇ ਰੈਫਰੈਂਸ (ਹਵਾਲਾ) ਨੰਬਰ ਦੱਸੋ।

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Foreword

Darlington Borough Council is committed to helping the people of Darlington having a bigger say in how local services are planned and delivered. In this way I hope that we can help people to get a better deal from their Council.

Only by genuinely engaging with local people can we develop services that really meet local needs and aspirations. The Council wants to get better at listening to people from all walks of life. We want to hear about people's ideas and experiences, and we want local people to be able to see how their views can shape the solutions that will make a lasting difference in Darlington.

This strategy shows how the Council's thinking about community engagement has moved on. It takes an honest look at where the Council is now and maps out the things that we need to do better in order to secure "a bigger say and a better deal for our communities".

In developing this strategy, I am proud that the Council has recently taken a lead in developing some shared standards that will help to guarantee the quality and processes of engagement between local people and public sector organisations across the borough.   The new Local Government White Paper: Stronger and Prosperous Communities has recently confirmed what we in Darlington already know. We all need to listen to communities and involve them in making a positive contribution to the local issues that really matter.

This strategy shows how we are going to do that. I am pleased to commend it to you.

Cllr John Williams
Leader of the Council

1. Vision

1.1.   The Council believes that community engagement is about developing a real dialogue between the public and the Council. This relationship should help both to understand and address the needs and issues experienced by local communities.

1.2.   By communities, the Council means:

i   Communities of place, people within a defined geographical area, like Darlington, Lascelles or a housing estate.

ii   Communities of interest or identity – people who share a particular experience, interest or characteristic, such as older people, faith groups, people from minority ethnic groups.

1.3.   People often belong to more than one community and communities themselves are usually very diverse.   People's sense of belonging may change throughout their lives.

1.4.   The aim of the Council's community engagement work is to ensure a bigger say and a better deal for our communities.

1.5.   The delivery of a bigger say and a better deal for our communities requires a succinct description of the organisation that the Council wants to become so it can see what it needs to do to become an organisation that is even more focused on local people. This description is also meant to help us understand how the public can be involved in quality control and how we can create the right vehicles for accommodating their feedback. The descriptors have been informed by the Local Government Improvement Network's thinking about what local authorities need to do to improve their engagement and sharpen their focus on the people they serve.

1.6.   An authority that is really close to its communities will have certain key characteristics. These include how the organisation incorporates community intelligence into plans, decision-making and performance management; and how it ensures that its staff and elected members have the competencies required to carry out engagement effectively. These characteristics are outlined in the descriptions below.

Leadership and governance

1.7.   Political and managerial leadership demonstrates a strong commitment to the involvement of the community in the business of the Council;

1.8.   Politicians and managers work in an open and transparent way. They respond positively to internal and external challenge;

1.9.   The Council and its services have a clear vision and sense of direction developed through partnership (with Darlington Partnership, in particular);

1.10.   Politicians and managers are keen to act on the results of customer focus or community engagement activity;

1.11. The Council understands the importance of diversity and that approaches to engagement need to reach all sections of the community;

1.12. The role of Darlington Partnership in relation to engaging with communities is defined and understood.

1.13. Politicians are supported to perform their key role of engaging with and representing the views of their constituents.

Resources and performance management

1.14. The public's views influence corporate and service strategies. Resources are moved to address community priorities;

1.15. The public's views are reflected in performance management;

1.16. The Council reports publicly on its performance;

1.17. Value for money is important and is seen by the public to be important to the Council.

Organisation and people

1.18. Structures and processes are designed to give the best chance of delivering a vision for the borough and its communities;

1.19. Engagement and consultation activities are co-ordinated and planned to avoid duplication;

1.20. Engagement and consultation activities are carried out to consistently high standards across the Council, feedback is given to participants;

1.21. Different methods and approaches to engagement are used (according to the issue) and tailored to different sections of the community;

1.22. The Council's workforce reflects the communities it serves;

1.23. Staff have the competencies they need to engage effectively, to listen to criticism and to build organisational and community capacity;

1.24. The results arising from consultation and the outcomes to which this leads are shared between partners.

The Ladder of Engagement

EMPOWERMENT

CAPACITY
BUILDING

CONSULTATION

INFORMATION
SHARING
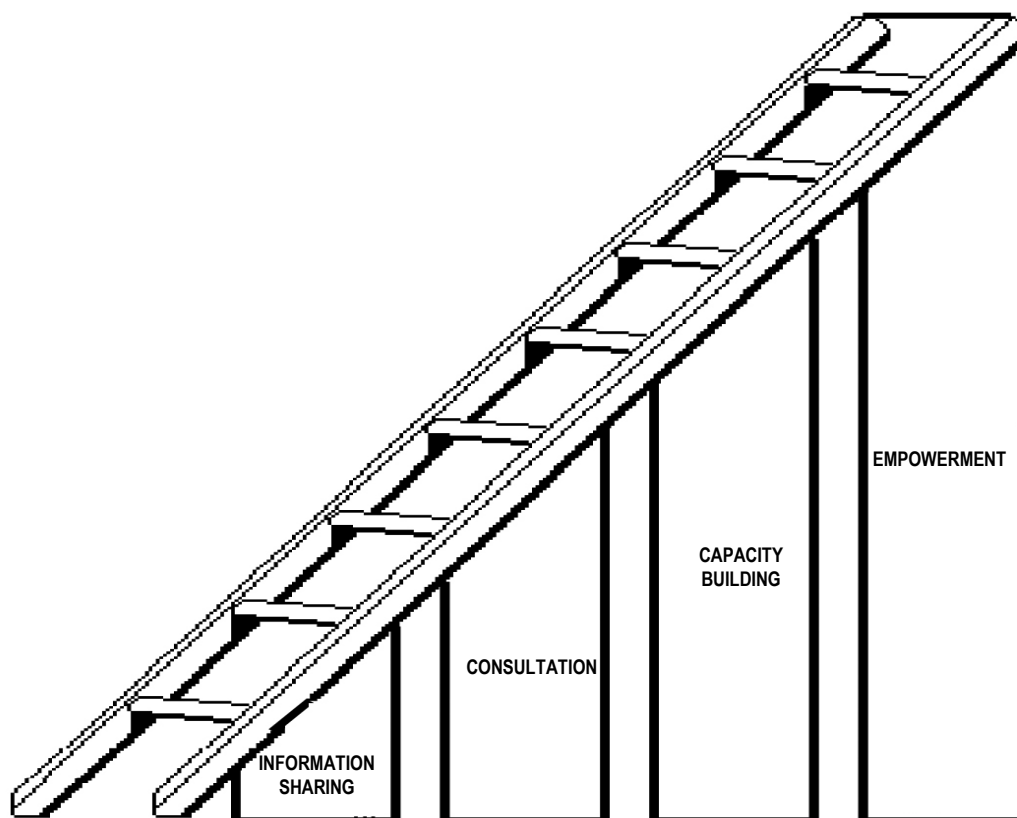
1.25. The ladder of engagement (adapted from Arnstein's ladder[1]) can aid an understanding of how the different levels of engagement work:

Information Sharing

1.26. Information sharing is simple and direct, often "one way" communication.

1.27. Council ⇨ Public: Town Crier news stories delivered to every household.

1.28. Public ⇨ Council: Council receives a request for service by telephone.

Consultation

1.29. Consultation can be done in many ways but it should be based around a dialogue that involves each side listening to and then responding to the other.

1.30. Council ⇨ Public: Feethams development consultation, where options for the future are presented to members of the public whose views are then acted on.

1.31. Public ⇨ Council: Members of the eleven community partnerships took a lead and consulted with Council officers over new ways for them to tackle graffiti on their

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[1] Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation", Journal of the American Planning Association, Vol-35, No. 4, July 1969

estates.

Capacity Building

1.32.   This is about one side working with the other to help it to help itself. Effective capacity building requires a collaborative approach.

1.33.   Council ⇨ Public: Facilitation of the emergence of new Community Partnerships in the borough's eleven most disadvantaged wards. This helps local people to get organised to tackle their own priorities.

1.34.   Public ⇨ Council: Volunteers helping to deliver the Council's Introduction to Deafness course. This improves the skills of Council staff in dealing with disabled people.

Empowerment

1.35.   The principle of empowerment is about one side working to give power or authority to another.

1.36.   Council ⇨ Public: Examples in Darlington include the Youth Opportunities Fund, Direct Payments and Darlington's eleven Community Partnerships.

1.37.   Public ⇨ Council: It could be argued that the public's empowerment of the Council is through the election process.

1.38.   Different levels of engagement between the Council and the public will be appropriate at different times and for different issues. One of the main challenges for the Council is to use this strategy to describe its appetite for engagement at particular levels on particular issues.

1.39.   The public's appetite for engagement with the Council is also likely to vary. Results from a recent MORI poll[2] show that:

    i   many people want good quality information about Council services but prefer the Council to get on with delivery without consulting them.

    ii   others would like to be consulted on issues that are of immediate concern or interest to them. This might include plans for changes to their local park or the shape of services that they use regularly.

    iii   some people are keen to get directly involved in their community. Sometimes they may be motivated by frustration at poor public services or by a desire to regenerate or reinvigorate their communities.

1.40.   In Darlington, we need to respond to this by thinking through and mapping which issues are likely to excite public interest or benefit from public feedback and which are not. For example, how we procure a new payroll system is unlikely to be of interest to most people nor is such a project likely to benefit from public involvement. But the converse is likely to be true for plans that affect the town

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[2] In MORI's 2005 poll of 1,000 people in Scotland, respondents were asked about the extent to which they wished to become involved with the work of a range of public institutions (including local Councils).
4 - 9% said, "I'm not interested in what the institution does or whether it does its job."
16 - 20% said, "I'm not interested in what the institution does so long as it does its job."
35 - 40% said, " I like to know what the institution is doing but I'm happy to let them get on with their job."
14 - 24% said, " I like to have a say in what the institution does and how it does its job."
9 - 13% said, "I would like to have more of a say in what the institution does and how it does its job."

centre.

1.41. The Council must make it clear that sometimes people will not be happy with the outcomes that flow from their engagement with the Council. This is likely to be because the Council has a responsibility to balance social, economic and environmental factors in making its decisions. It also reflects the fact that there is rarely only one public view on an issue.

2. Principles

What principles do we follow during engagement?

2.1.   Discussion amongst various public sector agencies in Darlington shows that there is a shared commitment to improving community engagement and reducing duplication. The following principles will be put forward to Darlington Partnership for their discussion and agreement. With the Partnership's agreement, they could provide a shared commitment to engagement from public sector agencies across Darlington. They could also help to ensure that engagement in Darlington is consistent and meets appropriate standards.

2.2.   From time to time public sector partners will engage in statutory consultation according to pre-determined guidelines. The techniques and timescales involved may mean that strict adherence to these principles is not possible in each of these cases.

Planning

1. **Identify the need**
    There must be clear evidence of a need to engage such as a statutory requirement or a knowledge gap.
2. **Consider other options**
    Be mindful of engagement fatigue. Are there other ways to obtain the views or information that is needed?
3. **Identify the right people**
    Be clear about exactly whom you need to engage. Is it particular groups, a whole community, a random sample of residents, those whose voices have been rarely heard in the past? Plan to publicise the opportunity to engage.
4. **Define the purpose**
    Engagement activity must have a clear purpose. Before engagement starts participants must know why they are involved.
5. **Plan for early engagement**
    Involve people at as early a stage as possible, bearing in mind any political, managerial or other constraints.
6. **Understand how you will know if engagement is successful**
    Plan an approach to evaluation.
7. **Engage in the right way**
    Select the right kind of engagement route and the most appropriate activity according to who you are engaging and the matter at hand. An equalities impact assessment may help to develop the best way forward

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Engaging

1. **Define what can be achieved**
   Be honest about what those with whom you are engaging can influence and what they can't. Describe any constraints or boundaries that may limit the engagement activity.

2. **Take an inclusive approach**
   The processes and outcomes of engagement should avoid discrimination and tackle inequalities. Try to work with a representative sample of people. Engage together with partners where appropriate.

3. **Consider "rarely heard" groups**
   Ask whether the engagement activity is reaching as many people across the full range of Darlington's demographic as it should (e.g. disabled people, those from minority faith and ethnic groups, people who live in disadvantaged wards, older people etc).

4. **Overcome barriers**
   Seek to overcome any barriers that arise during engagement. Make time to be flexible in order to facilitate the best engagement. This may mean formal and informal routes, and evening and weekend as well as office hours engagement.

5. **Respect confidentiality**
   Personal information about participants must be safeguarded.

Feeding Back

1. **Close the feedback loop**
   Provide participants with regular feedback on what difference their involvement will make. Explain what will happen when the engagement stops.

2. **Provide access to information**
   Participants should be able to have access to the information that they have provided and to comment on its accuracy. Shared access to some information may be limited due to its confidential nature.

3. **Complete the evaluation process that began in the planning stage**
   What can your organisation learn from the engagement activity? What did those involved think were its successes and failures? Be open to comments and complaints.

4. **Share Results**
   The results of the engagement activity should be made known to participants and, wherever possible, other partner organisations and the general public.

5. **Build organisational intelligence**
   Embed the learning from the engagement activity within your organisation. This may help to avoid duplication in the future.

3. Policy Context

Darlington

3.1.   A number of things are driving the Council's need to improve the way that it engages with the public. Darlington's Community Strategy has four visionary goals

      i   An area creating and sharing prosperity
      ii   A location for learning, achievement and leisure
      iii   A place for living safely and well
      iv   A high quality environment with excellent communication links.

3.2.   Aligned to these are the Council's own corporate objectives:

      i   Shaping a better Darlington
      ii   Providing excellent services
      iii   Putting the customer first
      iv   Ensuring access for all
      v   Enhancing our capacity to improve

3.3.   It is plain to see how the delivery of these is impossible without effective engagement with the public. But general satisfaction with the Council, although high (at 63.6%)[3], has remained relatively stable in recent years. It is anticipated that better engagement is likely to lead to improved satisfaction ratings.

3.4.   The Community Engagement Strategy is an essential part of the Council's organisation development strategy, Leading Edge. It is part of a planned and co-ordinated programme of development to ensure that the Council has the capacity, capability and systems to enable it to achieve its vision. The Community Engagement Strategy sits alongside our emerging Information and Communications Technology, Human Resources, Communications and Business Transformation strategies as a key strand of what the Council needs to put in place to fulfil its ambition of becoming a Leading Edge authority.

3.5.   Complementarily, better engagement, particularly engaging with people whose voices are rarely heard by the Council, is also an important part of what Darlington's Neighbourhood Renewal and Social Inclusion Strategies are trying to achieve.

3.6.   Evidently, there is a momentum for the delivery of this strategy coming from local people, the borough's existing Community strategy (and linked plans and strategies) and the Council's ambitions to become a Leading Edge authority.

3.7.   The local strategic context within which the council operates can be shown with a diagram as follows. The Community Engagement Strategy will sit under the Health Improvement and Social Inclusion Group.

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[3] Darlington Borough Council Annual Community Survey 2006

DARLINGTON PARTNERSHIP FAMILY OF STRATEGIES

Regional

Northern Way	Regional Economic Strategy
Learning Skills Council Plan	Regional Spatial Strategy
	Tees Valley Vision

COMMUNITY STRATEGY
"Where quality comes to life"

Themes

Economy & Environment Group			Learning & Culture P'ship	Childrens Trust	Community Safety Partnership	Health Improvement & Social Inclusion Group	
Economy	Environment	Transport	Leisure	Learning	Community Safety	Health	Social Inclusion

Priority Groups

Older Persons Strategy
Childrens & Young Peoples Plan
Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy

Local Area Agreement

Key Strategies

Economic Regeneration Strategy	Local Development Framework	Local Transport Plan	Cultural Strategy	Childrens & Young Peoples Plan	Crime, Disorder & Substance Misuse Strategy	Choosing Health	Social Inclusion Strategy
Darlington Gateway Development Framework	Climate Change Strategy	Accessibility Plan	Arts Strategy	14-19 Trust	Alcohol Strategy	Childhood Obesity	Community Legal Services Plan

Supporting Strategies

Town Centre Business Plan	Biodiversity Action Plan	Town on the Move	Sports Strategy	Adult Learners Plan	StreetSafe Strategy	Adult Obesity	Housing Strategy
Tourism Strategy	Litter Strategy	Cycling Strategy	Events Strategy	Early Years Plan	Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy	Accident Strategy	Supporting People Strategy
Pathways to Work	Tree Strategy	Road Safety Strategy	Leisure Pricing Policy	Extended Schools	Domestic Violence Strategy	Healthy Workforce	Homelessness Strategy
Markets Strategy	Countryside Strategy		Town Twinning	Healthy Schools	Substance Misuse Strategy	Mental Health & Well-being	Sure Start Strategy
	Recycling Strategy			Youth Strategy	Youth Offending Service Plan	Smoking Cessation/ Tobacco Control	Teenage Pregnancy Strategy
	Fairtrade Town				Persistent & Priority Offenders Strategy	Physical Activity	Breastfeeding Friendly Town

Service Plans

| PCT Health Improvement Plan | Durham Constabulary Policing Plan | DCoT Business Plan | DBC Best Value Performance Plan | Connexions Business Plan | CVS Business Plan | Business Link | Other public sector services – Fire, Schools, JC+ |

Private Sector

Local Government White Paper: Stronger and Prosperous Communities

3.8. The new Local Government White Paper places a new emphasis on public participation in local issues in order to progress the emerging "place-shaping" agenda. This is the idea that councils should be pro-active in working with others to drive forward local priorities in order to improve the area. Added to this, the White Paper acknowledges the growing importance of services that are responsive to the full diversity of need from all sectors of the public. This has implications for community cohesion, another important theme in the paper. All these themes are built on an assumption that responsive councils need to work on engaging the public they serve in order to improve outcomes for local people. Implicit within this is the idea that members of the public who engage with the Council have responsibilities, too.

3.9. The White Paper also recognises that engagement is vital in areas such as community safety and education, where people's attitudes and behaviour are central to achieving improved outcomes.

3.10. It is important to note that the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill, which followed the White Paper, makes engagement with communities a statutory function of local authorities for the first time. The Bill also recognises the need for different types of engagement in relation to different matters.

3.11. The strategic context outlined here has set the scene for the development of "A Bigger Say and a Better Deal for our Communities".

4. Locality Working: An Approach to Community Engagement That is Right for Darlington

4.1.   Locality working means different things to different councils. Darlington is a compact place with a single urban centre. Consequently, financial pressures tend to be borough-wide (e.g. social services, transport). However, there are some discrete opportunities for more localised working (e.g. tackling litter and graffiti in particular neighbourhoods). In the past we have recognised the importance and value of working at a local level, taking account of the distinctive nature and needs of different parts of the borough. A range of locality working is already in place; some of it linked to formal agreements, some of it structured around Darlington's five areas. Area 1: North West; area 2: Central; area 3: South West; area 4: South East; area 5: North East.
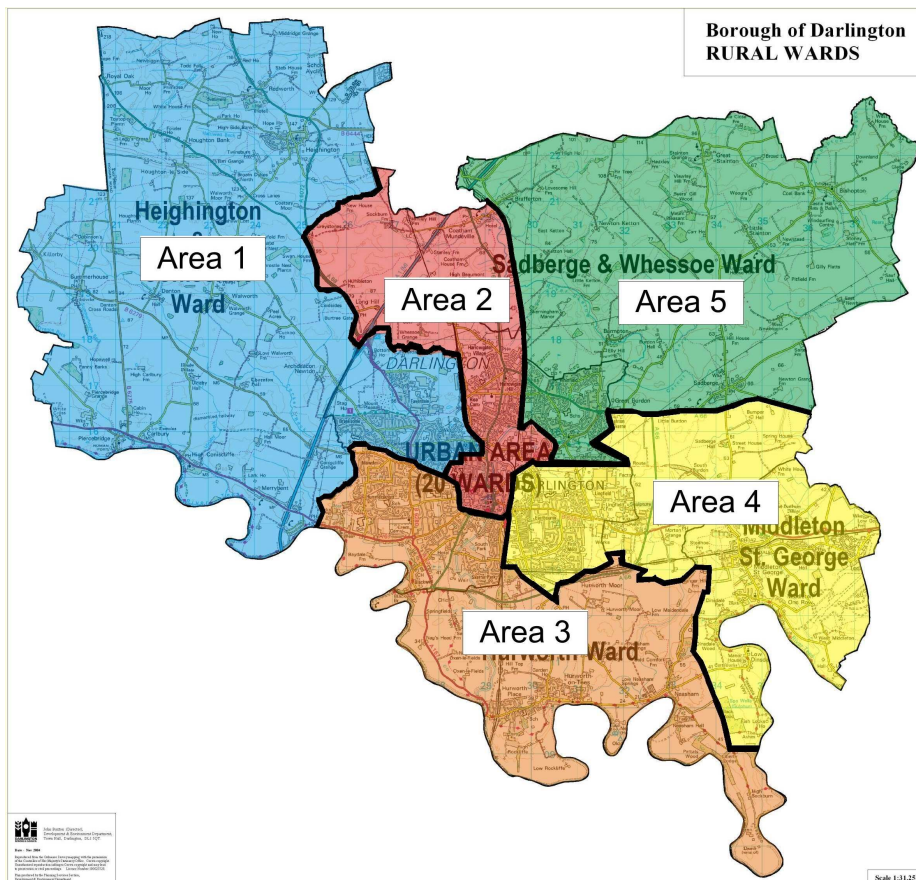
4.2.   The delivery of the following projects and services already relies upon strong engagement with local people in specific areas of the borough.

i   **Community Partnerships** - inclusive partnerships delivering neighbourhood renewal activity in the eleven most disadvantaged wards;

ii   **Street Scene** - re-engineered street services are now structured around empowered teams in five geographical areas;

iii   **Sure Start** - positive interventions for Darlington's most disadvantaged babies and toddlers and their families;

iv   **Extended Schools** and the

v   **School Clusters** Initiative - all Darlington schools now working in one of five geographical clusters (same areas as Street Scene), shared "cluster plans" now in development;

vi   **Neighbourhood policing** – now planned on a five area basis (as Street Scene);

vii   **Tackling Health Inequalities** – PCT and Council now working together to deliver, for example, targeted "stop smoking" programmes in disadvantaged areas;

viii   **Ward-based employment and skills training projects** - dozens of people helped back to work and in to training in Central, Firthmoor and Lascelles;

ix   **Open Spaces Strategy** - ensuring a network of accessible, safe and well-designed open spaces throughout the borough to support future quality of life, health and well-being, and biodiversity

x   **School travel planning** - working with children and young people to develop real travel choices to foster their independence and well-being, whilst promoting sustainable transport and reducing congestion linked to schools

xi   **Road Safety -** a positive approach to improving travel safety, combining engineering solutions, enforcement and responding to people's concerns and fears about travelling in the borough.

4.3.   The Local Government White Paper: Strong and Prosperous Communities emphasises the importance of local charters in developing locality working. Elected members are expected to be at the centre of these arrangements. Government recommends these charters as a way in which local authorities might improve participation in shaping policies, services and places. The White Paper notes that charters will typically take the form of a voluntary agreement between a local authority and a local community. They could cover:

i   the information the community can expect to get about the decisions, policies and services that affect them;

ii   the standards and targets which apply to the neighbourhood, including any agreed variations from the norm for the local authority area as a whole;

iii   priority actions to be adopted by service providers, along with any commitments from the local community to assist the local authority and service providers and to take action itself;

iv   options to take on wider responsibility for functions or facilities of direct interest to the community.

4.4.   Responding to the White Paper will therefore mean that we learn from our existing experience and from successes and failures elsewhere. This will help to develop a structured approach to locality working in Darlington. It is not something that can be developed overnight since it needs to reflect the facts that:

i   some services are best provided on a borough-wide scale;

ii   different services are likely to work better on different scales and across different geographical areas;

iii   elected members are central to locality working, and their views need to drive the vision for localities;

iv   the Council needs to balance the need for efficiency through economies of scale to find the most cost-effective means of locality working.

4.5.   It is likely that the formalisation of the Council's approach to some aspects of locality working in Darlington would:

i   raise the profile of elected members within specific localities;

ii   reduce the likelihood of the Council being in receipt of community governance petitions that will trigger reviews of governance in the communities in question;

iii   facilitate better delivery of the Local Area Agreement in specific parts of the borough;

iv   improve the Council's engagement with people outside of the Darlington's eleven most disadvantaged wards who currently do not benefit from community partnership arrangements;

v   improve the Council's accountability to the public and create a structure for dialogue at neighbourhood level;

vi   strengthen the Council's reputation as its commitment to openness is made more visible;

vii   pave the way for a fast pace of development in the future, taking advantage of the borough's compact size.

5. Self-assessment

Where are we now with Community Engagement? How can we improve?

5.1.   The following framework for a gap analysis is adapted from the Audit Commission's Knowing Your Communities Toolkit. It is included here because it brings an objective challenge to the Council's thinking about engagement. Carrying out the identified actions will help the Council to focus more clearly on the needs of the public and help to deliver the vision of this strategy.

Challenge	Response	What do we need to do to improve?	Who will carry out the action? By when?
What is the ambition for the area and its communities?			
Has the Council developed a vision?	The Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and supporting plans and strategies use long-term performance indicators to track progress of the delivery of a clear vision for Darlington. The Community Strategy Action Plan contains evidence of improving outcomes for local people.	Undertake 5-year review of Community Strategy in 2007. Continue delivery of neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion strategies.	Steve Rose, June 07 Sharon Brown/ David Plews, May 07
Has the vision been developed in partnership?	Darlington Partnership has a history of delivering agreed actions in partnership. The Community Stratgey was developed in partnership and is owned by all partner organisations. Evidence of this is the attainment records of each of the four Partnership themed groups.	Undertake annual review of Community Strategy action plan, informed by the findings of the themed enquiry groups.	Steve Rose, June 07
Is there support for the involvement of local people?	Some under-representation with regard to Darlington's eleven Community	Targets need to be set for increasing levels of civic participation from under-represented groups, e.g. Gypsy,	Linda Todd, June 07

	Partnerships is being remedied through community development work with Darlington's BME community.	Traveller and immigrant electoral roll registration initiatives.	
		Progress inter-faith group dialogue	Rev John Dobson, ongoing
	Participation programmes are delivered through the Events Strategy, Cultural Strategy, Sports Development Programme, Democratic Services' support of Youth Parliament elections.	Set targets for participation/engagement through Street Scene and other Leading Edge initiatives.	Ian Thompson, December 07
		Deliver the Community Engagement Strategy	Ada Burns, October 08
What is the response to legislation?	Compliance with equalities legislation is strong. Promoting Inclusive Communities (embracing the equalities and social inclusion agendas) is one of the Community Strategy priorities.	Review Council's Human Rights compliance.	David Plews, September 07
		Ensure Strategic Social Inclusion and Inclusion Implementation groups stay up-to-date with best practice.	David Plews, ongoing
		Continue to roll-out equalities in procurement guidance, check Council adherence and support the roll-out with training events for suppliers as appropriate.	Susan White / David Plews, September 07
		Check Council compliance with new and emerging equalities legislation.	David Plews ongoing
Does the Council's ambition include its role as an employer?	The Council's approach to its organisational development strategy, Leading Edge, encompasses developmental work with its staff through a new HR strategy.	Research and produce a Disability Equality Scheme, involving disabled staff in the process.	David Plews / Gordon Pybus (Chair of Darlington Association on Disability), implementation ongoing from December 06
		Research, produce and implement a Gender Equality Scheme.	David Plews, draft by April 07
	Community Engagement working group, comprising staff	Improve internal communications, bearing	Steve Jones ongoing

	from each department, inaugurated in March 06.	in mind that most Council staff are also residents of the borough.	
Is there clear and evidenced understanding of local needs?			
Is information gathered through consultation?	Much information is gathered via a diverse range of approaches. There has been particular success developing the Council's engagement with young people. More work is required to derive corporate learning from the results of consultation. Many of these are described in the Council's equalities impact assessments.	Revise corporate consultation strategy and include guidance on "closing the feedback loop".

Develop a strategy for improving corporate intelligence. | John Bosson, May 07

John Bosson, May 07 |
| What use is made of demographic data? | The Council accesses a range of demographic data but this has not informed the development of a corporate knowledge base. Information sources have not been assessed by customer groups but data analysis is used to map inequalities in the Darlington Profile. The Council can demonstrate how engagement has been tailored to the needs of different communities. | Check information sources with customer groups to ensure accuracy.

Develop a more sophisticated approach to postcode analysis, customer segmentation and demographic information. Link this to emerging work on corporate intelligence. | David Goodchild, September 07

Lorraine O'Donnell, January 08 |
| Does the Council use its own information about the take-up of services | The Council uses data about service take-up but there is no uniform approach across the Council.   A new | Development of a more robust and organised customer interface, which joins up back office services to provide a single point of use for | Sharon Brown/Ken Walker, January 08 |

	approach to Customer Relationship Management was developed in 2006 through a customer contact centre.	customers. Builds on achievements of Customer Relationship Management System. This helps the Council to addresses inequalities in service provision.	
		Better testing of service plans with stakeholder groups and better information on stakeholders' satisfaction with quality of service.	Andrew Robinson, November 07
		Development of a formal mechanism for this.	Andrew Robinson, January 08
Is information shared with partners?	A range of information is shared in a structured way through the Council's External Funding Team. The Darlington Partnership operates in a performance-driven and transparent way.	Develop information sharing protocols in respect of personal information via corporate intelligence work programme.	John Bosson, September 07
Have clear priorities for all communities been agreed in consultation with partners?	Priorities delivered through Community, Social Inclusion and Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies. These documents show the alignment of key partners priorities with those of the Council. Importantly, these priorities relate to communities of interest and communities of identity and were developed in consultation with representatives from these communities.	Ensure that the Council is in a position to describe to stakeholders which areas of its business are not priorities.	Andrew Robinson, October 07
Are there local and national priorities?	The Council can demonstrate how it	Further work, via Performance Plus, to be	David Goodchild, October 07

	has integrated national priorities with those of local communities. Through Community Survey, Citizen's Panel, Tenant Participation Panel etc. the Council knows what issues matter most to local people.	undertaken with regard to the reconciliation of national and local targets (e.g.: educational attainment), so that performance improvement can easily be understood in both local and national contexts.	
How are changes in priorities communicated?	Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and service plans contain a clear articulation of strategic priorities but there is not always regular and comprehensive feedback following consultation.	Update consultation strategy to include guidance on "closing the feedback loop". Need clear links to Communications Strategy, so that the rationale for Council decisions is better communicated.	John Bosson, May 07
Does the Council have a leadership role in promoting its priorities?	Council links directly to the Darlington Partnership through the Chief Executive's Office. Partnership themed groups drive cross-service partnership working and prioritisation.	Develop a better understanding of the development of service delivery partnerships through the application of a Partnership toolkit	Steve Rose, ongoing - with annual reports for all major partnerships.
Are ambitions and priorities supported by clear decision-making and accountability			
Are there clear leads or champions in place?	The Leader of the Council is the member champion for community engagement and the Chief Executive is the officer champion. Community partnerships in the eleven most deprived wards deliver opportunities for local decision-making.	Further development work is required for the Council to position itself as a champion of customer focus within the town. Lead the development of a borough-wide Community	David Plews, December 07

	Positive messages about successful engagement and performance improvements are promoted (e.g. Town Crier).	Engagement Strategy.	
Are there inclusive decision-making processes	Council decision-making is generally open and accessible but there is not always widespread awareness by service users of how they have influenced changes to service delivery. There is widespread community activity through a range of sustainable community groups.	Implementation of "you said…", " we did…" information for Council service users (e.g.: Town Crier, website). Closer working between the Council, CVS, VCS would help embed a culture of public participation. Facilitate this through the review of the VCS.	Steve Jones, May 07 Sharon Brown, ongoing from 2007
Are priorities reflected in service plans?	Partnership and Council priorities are cascaded into departmental and service plans. There is a clear mapping process for this.	Assess the viability of using departmental or service plans to articulate what service improvements are required for particular groups of customers, i.e. mainstreaming social inclusion strategy	Andrew Robinson, August 07
Are impact assessments in place?	A standard approach for undertaking assessments is in place. All Council service areas have undertaken impact assessments. These have been tested with representatives from all of Darlington's social inclusion strategy priority groups. The results have been published.	Disability Equality Scheme should contain step-by-step guide to the assessment process, which should be applicable to localised actions as well as major policy changes and projects.	David Plews, ongoing roll-out of process during 2007
Is capacity being developed to ensure priorities can be delivered?			
Is the workforce able	Competency	Evaluate training and	Carol Wyers,

to support these priorities?	frameworks are in place for all jobs. New HR strategy in development as part of Leading Edge approach.	development on the extent to which it facilitates better customer focus. Increase awareness of the skills needed in the workforce for effective engagement. Research and implement joint approaches to the development of a customer-focused workforce with other partners.	December 07
Are staff being recruited and developed to support these priorities	Delivery of Positive Action Strategy as part of the Corporate Equalities Plan. Linking of PDRs to the achievement of departmental and corporate objectives.	Develop more organised engagement with full diversity of staff and use this to inform HR practice. Deliver positive action so that the Council can be described as one which is broadly representative of the communities it serves. Rating of "performing strongly" is not possible without this.	Maggie Swinden, October 07
Does the culture support staff in customer focus and equality?	Leading Edge has brought renewed focus to community engagement and customer focus agendas. Corporate approach to equalities is mainstreamed through both corporate and departmental working groups. Good examples of inter-departmental working.	Review corporate use of customer care/ satisfaction surveys to make sure that opportunities for individual choice have been maximised. Link to Community Engagement Strategy.	Sharon Brown and David Plews, October 07
Are ICT systems used to support these priorities?	RNIB "see it right" approval has been gained for Council website. There are thousands of visits every quarter to multi-language mini-sites. Information for All DVD is a groundbreaking resource about	Review whether most ICT access points comply with the requirements of the DDA. ICT Strategy to include action that will enable the Council to demonstrate that ICT has been used to improve access to all Council departments and	Ken Walker, June 07

	services access for those whose first language is other than English or who prefer to receive information in a visual format.	partner services. Check and improve community access to ICT and use ICT more to improve communication and consultation.	
Is procurement used to support these priorities?	Delivery of Leading Edge Procurement Project is on track. Equalities and Procurement Guidance for Managers published on the intranet.	Ensure that EIAs are used to inform the development of new contracts to ensure that they do not adversely affect particular communities.	Susan White, December 2007
Is performance management used to assess progress against planned outcomes to drive further improvement?			
Is there a system in place to measure performance on these priorities?	In Darlington the LSP and Council share a performance management system. The Community Strategy Action Plan shows how performance data is being used to help understand and respond to "quality of life" issues.	Community Engagement Strategy to include performance management framework for community engagement/ involvement. Examine potential of using data already recorded in Performance Plus to derive an overview on community engagement.	David Plews, May 07
Are complaints used to drive improvement?	Effective and accessible complaints procedure is in place. Stage 3 complaints now subject to equalities monitoring. Cabinet receives Ombudsman reports.	Review complaints to deliver learning for the organisation. Link to corporate intelligence project.	Andrew Robinson and John Bosson, August 07
Is performance information useful to local people and service users?	The Community Strategy Action plan and the Council's Corporate Plan provide robust performance data. It includes comparative	No further action required	N/a

	information.		
Have service users been able to influence how performance is measured?	Some very strong evidence of engagement and consultation (e.g. in housing), but a consistent approach has not yet been developed across all services. Delivery on Neighbourhood Renewal and Social Inclusion strategies is helping to reduce inequalities.	The development of a Community Engagement Strategy will help to set agreed standards for engagement and "closing the feedback loop".	David Plews, May 07
Has feedback from customers and complaints been used to improve services?	Effective and accessible complaints procedure is in place. Stage 3 complaints now subject to equalities monitoring.	Review complaints to deliver learning for the organisation. Link to corporate intelligence project.	Andrew Robinson and John Bosson, May 07
Is the Council open to scrutiny and independent review?	Effective scrutiny is delivering inter-departmental and inter-agency challenge (e.g. Social Affairs and Health Scrutiny's delivery of the "Darlington: A Breastfeeding Friendly Town" project.) Professionally developed external challenge on equalities has been delivered through the "Putting the Quality into Equality" project.	Scrutiny to have more detailed involvement in the development of service plans.	Andrew Robinson, roll-out through 2007

6. Developing People: Organisational Readiness

6.1.   The Council's 4,800 members of staff are central to the delivery of the Council's community engagement aims. The Leading Edge Human Resources Strategy will drive forward the changes that need to be made. Specifically, this includes the need to ensure that competency frameworks and supporting training are amended for those whose jobs will, in future, facilitate or react to stronger community engagement.

6.2.   Building better corporate intelligence so that staff have access to information from past engagement activity and are able to see at a glance the Council's planned activity in this area will be important. This work is being taken forward through a corporate project on knowledge management that will deliver better mechanisms for accessing this information by May 07. By the same deadline, a review into the Council's complaints process will have reported. This will suggest new ways of improving both the Council's engagement with the public and the way it provides services for them by firmly embedding within the Council the learning we develop from complaints.

6.3.   It will be necessary for elected members as well as staff to be prepared for the implications of delivering the Community Engagement Strategy, which is why elected members will be fully consulted on its development. The action that the Council has agreed to take in this area is described in the action plan at the end of the strategy. This is to ensure that elected members continue to have the support they need to carry out their roles effectively in the light of the new Local Government Bill.

6.4.   Developing our elected members and staff is crucial to the delivery of this strategy but to be worthwhile it has to be matched with a commitment from the Council to build capacity among local groups, organisations and individuals to enable them to engage with the Council. The Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy explains specifically how the Council will do this. This is likely to be supplemented with the findings of a Neighbourhood Renewal Enquiry commissioned by the Darlington Partnership board.

6.5.   There are key interdependencies between the Community Engagement Strategy and the other strands of Leading Edge.   In particular, corporate approaches to both Communications and ICT need to be improved in order to properly deliver the Community Engagement Strategy.   With respect to communications, "closing the feedback loop" will be particularly important.   In the future there is a need for residents to have a much clearer understanding of their Council's performance. In relation to ICT, there are significant improvements to be made in consultation and community empowerment by more innovative use of the Council's website (e.g. podcasts, "live" consultation).

7. Opportunities and Areas for Development in 2007/08

Opportunities

7.1.   These opportunities are categorised according to whether their impact will be borough-wide (and affect many communities) or more localised (and affect only particular communities of interest and/or identity). It's important to remember that people tend to feel most strongly about local issues that directly affect them and their quality of life. This needs to be balanced with a recognition that engaging with people on appropriate strategic issues can save time and money later on. Some action to exploit these opportunities is included within the action plan of this strategy, other opportunities and areas for development will be explored further by the Community Engagement Strategy steering group in the future. Recommendations will be made on further actions required in a paper to be presented to Council in summer 2007.

Borough-wide Impact

7.2.   LAA: how can customers' views inform the ways that we are seeking to improve outcomes for children and young people? Young Caretakers and Street Champions initiatives offer specific opportunities.

7.3.   Partnerships governance toolkit: This will bring a more rigorous approach to partnership working in Darlington. It will allow community representatives to be properly heard and customers' views to be given the proper weight.

7.4.   Review of community strategy: Darlington Partnership will lead on this in 2007. It will be important for setting the borough's shared future aims and objectives and is a huge opportunity to increase the public's involvement in this process.

7.5.   Exciting capital developments in Darlington: new infrastructure offers new opportunities for service improvement and customer engagement through a number of improved customer contact points.

7.6.   Leading Edge programme: This is about developing new ways of working for the Council. Much can be gained from "building in" a robust approach to customer focus from the start.

7.7.   Review of the Council's engagement with the voluntary and community sector: A high profile review will identify opportunities for more structured engagement with this sector. This is important for developing social capital so that the sector can influence service provision.

7.8.   Roll-out of Streetscene: This is giving an area focus to key services.

Localised Impact

7.9.   NRS review: The review will help the Council to focus on what local people have said are priority issues at neighbourhood/ward level.

7.10.   Existing community events: Darlington-by-the-Sea involves hundreds of local people. How can we use events like this, and the Community Carnival (now in its

25th year), to engage with people in an innovative way?

7.11.   Development of the Council's first Disability Equality Scheme: Delivering the scheme is a chance to test approaches to the empowerment of a minority community.

7.12.   Development of a Tenants' Empowerment Strategy: Work here will allow us to test new approaches to community empowerment within defined parameters.

7.13.   Development of Extended Schools: A chance to involve staff, parents and children in closer-working partnerships to derive benefits for the whole community.

Areas for Development

7.14.   These areas need to be tackled on a longer-term basis. They cover strategic, resource and procedural issues as well as those that will have a more immediate impact on the public. The Council's Community Engagement Strategy action plan takes these areas for development as a starting point.

7.15.   Information Sharing

i   improve the public's perception of our accountability;
ii   help staff to perceive community engagement as part of their core business and as one of their core skills;
iii   produce an engagement "tool kit" to ensure consistently high standards across the Council.

7.16.   Consultation

i   planning of engagement activity at the inception of projects rather than at the end;
ii   ensure that the public's experience of engagement with the Council is positive;
iii   with regard to consultation processes, close feedback loops.

7.17.   Capacity Building

i   the sharing of corporate intelligence resulting from consultation/ complaints;
ii   more joined-up approach between the Council, other agencies and the community in particular geographical areas;
iii   recognise and plan for the fact that listening to those groups and individuals that are rarely heard is time and resource intensive;
iv   ensure synergy between the Communications Strategy, Human Resources Strategy and the Community Engagement Strategy;
v   exploit the expertise of those in customer-facing roles in the improvement of organisational systems and community engagement;
vi   better resource the costs of consultation;
vii   explore the feasibility of establishing an awards scheme for the most effective and innovative consultation/engagement activity within Darlington;
viii devise a formal annual work programme for community engagement and customer focus activity;
ix   Refine the role of the Community Engagement Strategy Steering Group so that momentum on delivery can be sustained.

7.18.   Empowerment

    i   ensure a strategic and consistent approach to community engagement that can clearly evidence continuous improvement;

    ii   develop a whole Council approach to community empowerment;

    iii   identify a single point of responsibility for and/or champions for community engagement, customer focus and consultation;

    iv   ensure that community engagement drives service planning.

8. Conclusion

8.1.   Improving its engagement with communities is a central part of what the council needs to do to become more responsive to the needs of the public and to progress on its journey to become a Leading Edge authority.

8.2.   Aims and principles for this area of work have been agreed, gaps identified, good practice considered and actions put forward.

8.3.   Intelligence from many past consultation and broader engagement exercises has been used to inform the development of the strategy.   New discussions with representatives from the voluntary and community sectors and between the diverse members of the Community Engagement Strategy Steering Group have also been instructive.   The Council has been careful to avoid unnecessary "consultation about consultation".

8.4.   In doing this a number of recurring themes emerged. People understand that the Council can't please everyone all of the time but they don't understand why the Council doesn't always explain the reasons for its decisions and people expect to see, over time, how their (and others') engagement with the Council leads to change for the better. There is also a desire for a consistency of approach.   This strategy will help the Council to do these things and in doing so it will help secure a bigger say and a better deal for our communities.

Recommendations

8.5.   Finally, there are six recommendations that will be central to the Council's future success.

    i   Taking a deliberate, planned approach to engagement, which means analysing future developments and planning in advance a programme of engagement activity relating to these.
    ii   Linking the outcomes of this engagement activity directly into the Council's business planning process so that it is possible to prove what difference engagement is making to service provision.
    iii   Defining localities and when locality working is appropriate.
    iv   Modernising communications vehicles so that the "virtual space" for engagement is improved.
    v   Commencing capacity building/training work with officers, elected members and stakeholders.
    vi   Developing a programme of medium-term actions, which will be put forward for Council consideration in summer 2007.

8.6.   The following action plan shows what the Council needs to do to commence implementation of these recommendations.

8.7.   If you have any comments about this strategy, please contact:

Policy Advisor (Social Inclusion)
Chief Executive's Office
Darlington Borough Council
Town Hall
Darlington
DL1 5QT

01325 388023

david.plews@darlington.gov.uk

9. Action Plan

9.1. The following action plan describes priorities for the period March to July 2007.

Action	Why?	Resources	Who?	When?
Taking a planned approach to engagement				
1. Deliver corporate intelligence project.	To join-up Council knowledge on community engagement.	Existing resources.	John Bosson	April 07
2. Develop a consultation database on the intranet	To minimise consultation fatigue and avoid duplication	Existing resources	John Bosson	April 07
3. Research, produce and consult on the development of a Gender Equality Scheme.	To make any improvements in gender equality performance that are still outstanding.	Existing social inclusion budget	David Plews	April 07
4. Develop a rolling programme of strategic consultation.	To make informed decisions about resource allocation for future consultation.	Any additional resources to be proposed and agreed by CMT/Cabinet/Council as appropriate	Andrew Robinson/ David Plews	June 07
Linking to business planning process				
5. To explore with the Corporate Planning Network the feasibility of formally linking engagement activity to the Council's business planning process.	To devise a framework to use with next year's service planning process.	Existing resources.	David Plews/ Andrew Robinson	July 07
Defining localities				
6. To devise and propose to Council a set of medium term actions for community engagement, including developing the Council's approach to locality working. This should be informed by research into good practice.	To complete the Community Engagement Strategy.	Existing resources.	David Plews	July 07

Modernising communications				
7. Structure Town Crier content in a "You said x", "We did y" format. Examine feasibility of making this a regular feature.	To close the feedback loop.	Existing resources.	John Bosson/ Steve Jones	April 07
8. Publish the Community Engagement Strategy on the Council's website and intranet and in any other format on request.	To meet the Council's targets for publication of the strategy.	Existing resources.	Kathryn Plant	April 07
9. To develop a virtual space for engagement on the Council website – a "community interface".	To develop an ongoing dialogue between the Council and members of the public.	Existing resources	Steve Jones/ Hayley Gyllenspetz	June 07
Capacity building and training				
10. Revise the role of the community engagement strategy steering group, revising membership and re-focusing it on implementation.	To ensure delivery of the strategy.	Existing resources.	David Plews	May 07
11. Examine the feasibility of whether additional staffing resource is needed to improve the Council's performance in community engagement and corporate intelligence.	To put in place the infrastructure the Council needs to progress these linked areas of work.	Existing resources.	David Plews/ John Bosson	June 07
12. Develop training programme/resource linked to undertaking engagement activity for equalities impact assessments.	To ensure strong awareness of the community engagement agenda and what it means for staff in their everyday jobs.	Additional training resources are likely to be required. To be quantified in the HR Strategy.	Carol Wyers	July 07
13. Ensure HR strategy contains specific action to amend the competency framework for staff whose jobs involve community	To ensure that the workforce is able to deliver the principles of this strategy.	Existing resources.	Carol Wyers	July 07

engagement.				
14. Develop a mechanism for responding to "community calls for action" as described in the recent Local Government White Paper.	To join-up the Council's approaches to proactive and reactive engagement.	Existing resources	Linda Todd	July 07