

Picture

Jacqui Thompson, Chair of Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership.

Foreword

The Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership (LDLSP) believes that local people have the best idea of what needs to be done to improve their quality of life. As a partnership we believe that engagement and decision making with local communities is at the heart of our existence. It enables those who live, work, study, visit and play in the Lancaster district to tell us what needs improving and therefore influence LDLSP decisions, the Sustainable Community Strategy, and ultimately the way our services are delivered.

Following the launch of the Lancaster District Sustainable Community Strategy in 2008, we promised that we would look at engagement across the district and see how we can improve as a partnership to ensure that the way we engage and involve our communities is not a token gesture or a single activity, but an integral part of all our working practices and the fundamental basis of everything we do. We also said that we would look at how we could be more co-ordinated and efficient in our engagement with you, and reduce the need for you to constantly engage and consult with separate organisations on similar issues. We also recognise that there are times when you want to have different levels of engagement, and that this is dependent on whether you are most likely to be affected by our services, policies and decisions. This Community Engagement Strategy is about how the Partnership can support you in becoming more involved in decisions to help improve our local communities. We understand the importance of engaging with those people who are most likely to be affected by services, policies and decision. We will especially consider the involvement of people whose voices may not be heard or who may be invisible from decision making processes.

This Community Engagement Strategy recognises the diversity of our district, the importance of community capacity building, and the need to provide appropriate opportunities for communities to participate at whatever level they wish to influence service delivery, decision making and policy development. It recognises that barriers to engagement exist for some communities and this strategy has provided useful tools that can overcome these barriers to allow effective and meaningful engagement to take place.

Through feedback and consultation in developing this strategy, you have told us that there is some good work already ongoing in the district. However we recognise that we have still much more work to do to ensure that community engagement in the Lancaster district strengthens our links with the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS). With this information we are closer to identifying the sector's vision for community engagement and to putting the right tools in place to make that vision a reality. The Partnership recognises the significant role that VCFS organisations have to play in making sure that we use the right approaches to engaging local residents and communities of interest.

This Community Engagement Strategy sets out what we mean by engagement, why we are committed to engaging our local communities, and how we plan to engage

now and in the future. It has been designed to ensure that engagement opportunities are provided in the most appropriate way for all stakeholders to be involved and give feedback. Our promise to you is that we will listen to you, consider your ideas, and keep you informed about what input we receive and how it will shape our future decisions.

This will never be a final document and neither can we finish the job within the lifetime of this strategy. We will look to build on this toolkit and keep seeking your views as to the best use of resources to make sure that engagement is seen as a policy priority across the District, rather than the activity of a few in one organisation. I am excited about this partnership approach to engagement and what it can deliver for all of us, and I look forward to reporting our successes through this strategy

Acknowledgements

The Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership would like to thank North East Lincolnshire District Council for allowing the partnership to use their framework as a template.

The partnership would also like to thank Andrew Woods from CN Research, and Jez Hall for carrying out the research stages of the project (stage 1a and 1b).

Most of all, the partnership would like to thank everyone who has taken part in the research including partners, individual members of community, various community groups, parish councils, businesses etc.

The **Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership (LDLSP)** co-ordinates activities to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of the District and its communities. It improves the way services are planned, bringing people together to work on ideas which help to achieve the aims of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

Our Current Partners:

Age Concern

Arnsdale and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership

Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Eden

Environment Agency

Furniture Matters

Help Direct

Job Centre Plus

Lancashire Association of Local Councils

Lancashire Constabulary

Lancashire County Council

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service

Lancaster District Community Safety Partnership

Lancaster City Council

Lancaster District Children's Trust Partnership

Lancaster District Community Leaders Group

Lancaster District Council for Voluntary Services

Lancaster District Older Persons Partnership

Lancaster District Sustainability Partnership

Lancaster & District YMCA

Lancaster & Morecambe Citizens Advice Bureaux

Lancaster & Morecambe College

Lancaster University

Lonsdale Carers

National Coalition Building Institute

NHS North Lancashire

North West Learning & Skills Council

One Voice Disability Services

Signposts

University of Cumbria

Vision Board

Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership's (LDLSP) Community Engagement Strategy

Introduction

Our Sustainable Community Strategy is the aspirational shared vision of how the area could look in 2022.

It states:

[By] Working together we will improve the quality of life for everyone in the Lancaster District.

To achieve this vision, we need to make sure that we engage with the communities within the Lancaster district so that the improvements we make and the services we deliver, reflect the needs and desires of Lancaster district residents and are agreed and jointly owned by them.

Only by genuinely engaging with our communities can we improve and develop services which truly meet local need and aspiration, and ultimately contribute to the realisation of our shared vision.

This community engagement strategy sets out what we mean by effective and meaningful engagement, why we are committed to engaging, what barriers we need to overcome to engage effectively, and how we plan to engage now and in the future.

Background

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 introduced a statutory duty on members of the LDLSP to ensure that community engagement informs decision making at all levels. The introduction of the "Communities and Local Government (2008) *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities Statutory Guidance*, also places a duty for Local Strategic Partnerships and individual partners to consult, inform and involve local people in key decisions to ensure that people have greater opportunities to influence decision-making and get involved. More recently, the "Duty to Involve" came into force in April 2009, side by side with the new Comprehensive Area Assessment. The core aim of Duty to Involve is to make it standard practice for a local authority and their partners to empower and engage local people through their delivery of local services, and local decision making.

Research and evidence, both locally and nationally, demonstrate that there will be benefits to both communities and public services when meaningful engagement is undertaken. Community Empowerment is equally as important for national government and the current drive on "Strengthening local democracy by giving citizens a much bigger role in shaping the places in which they live and the public services they use" is at the heart of the LDLSP Engagement Strategy and toolkit.

The LDLSP agreed that as part of its' Policy Strategy within its governance structures the partnership wanted to develop a Community Engagement Strategy. This would enable and improve engagement with communities within the Lancaster district, so

that improvements in social, economic and environmental well-being can be achieved.

The partnership felt it was important to localise national guidance and to do this by carrying out research with local communities. There is good work going on in our district but we still have much more to do. We consulted, listened to and took account of people's views from all aspects of community engagement and we will continue to work with these people and act upon their suggestions as part of ongoing community engagement in our area. We believe that this inclusive approach will help us to make a significant contribution to achieving our shared goals and ambitions across the whole of the Lancaster district.

Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership Community Engagement Project

Although there are a number of Community Engagement Strategies/strategy documents already in place, the LDLSP wanted to ensure that our Community Engagement Strategy and Toolkit was bespoke for the Lancaster district. The LDLSP project team were set three project objectives.

- To undertake information gathering from the Lancaster district 'community' which will inform the LDLSP as to how people wish to engage with partners in future to ensure we have accessible and well publicised opportunities for engagement to take place.
- To research locally with partners, nationally and internationally for best practice.
- To produce a draft Community Engagement Strategy for the LDLSP and other partners to use including a charter contain principles of community engagement and a toolkit.

Consultation and best practice research has informed the strategy. Consultation took place within the Lancaster district using the below listed local communities, and the consultation methods that were utilised included telephone interviews, face to face questionnaires, surveys, internet sites and focus groups. It is appreciated that there are a large number of communities in the district, and although we have endeavoured to capture a significant number of our known communities, this list is not exhaustive. However, this will never be a final document and neither can we ever finish the job in the lifetime of this strategy. We see this toolkit as an ongoing document and we will keep seeking your views as to the best use of resources to make sure that engagement is seen as a policy priority across the District.

- Partners
- Stakeholders
- Older people 50+ (50)
- Children and young people
- Students: Lancaster University (50)
- Businesses (50)
- Carers (50)
- People with disabilities (25)
- Urban communities including: West end, Poulton, Ridge and Newton, Skerton, Marsh, Ryelands, Vale and Heysham Central (140)

- Rural communities including: Carnforth, Lower Lune Valley, North and South, Silverdale and Bolton Le Sands (125)
- Polish Community (group of 10)
- Traveller Community (group of 9)
- Chinese Community (group of 12)
- Hindu Community (group of)
- Muslim Community (group of 6)
- Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender Community (group of 10)

Our research with partners demonstrated a real willingness to improve and recognise that community engagement makes a difference. However, we did find that Partners' views on current community engagement didn't necessarily tally with stakeholder views. The partnership recognises it has work to do and is committed to working together to improve community engagement and make this work.

LDLSP partners were consulted on and signed up to implementing the LDLSP Community Engagement Strategy (Strategy and toolkit) in August/September 2009.

Through the development and implementation of this Community Engagement Strategy, the LDLSP recognises the value to be gained by seeking to engage beyond the statutory requirements and that we can achieve added value by working together rather than individually. Working in partnership will help to create efficiencies, reduce duplication and reduce consultation fatigue. Community Engagement will be placed at the heart of service determination, planning and delivery.

By taking a community engagement approach to policy and service planning, commissioning services and delivery, we will be able to ensure that we base our decisions on community needs. By providing feedback to the community about the way we used their participation to shape our decisions, we will create confidence in the community that the services we deliver meet local needs and will create positive public perception of the services provided to the community.

This Strategy has been developed to be the key reference for community engagement by the LDLSP. It sets out the strategic vision and guiding principles for community engagement within the Lancaster district. This strategy should be used as the starting point for the delivery of all community engagement by the LDLSP and it is designed to supplement and support our statutory responsibilities.

We have also developed a Community Engagement Toolkit to provide advice and guidance around engagement mechanisms, methods and processes.

This Toolkit (and the Strategy) has been tailored to Lancaster district needs and is built on a wealth of local and extended research, experience, and best practice and will help members of the LDLSP to use methods of engagement that are consistent with the principles of this strategy. The Toolkit is a living document and can be updated to reflect new methods of engagement as they emerge.

The Community Engagement Strategy compliments existing guidelines and policies held by local authorities including in the Police, Primary Care Trust, Fire and Rescue Services, City and County Council and Local Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector Organisations.

The Community Engagement Strategy and Toolkit have been written in line with Lancaster City Council's Corporate Equalities Strategy, which seeks to value diversity and promote equality through practice and procedures. They are also written in accordance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which places a duty on local authorities to work in partnership to tackle crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour.

Context

Why should we engage the community?

Because we want to! Lancaster district is unique and high quality local knowledge about our communities will help the development of joint service delivery based on issues and priorities that are agreed and owned by partners and communities in the Lancaster district. We need to make sure that we are doing things that people need and want.

- The community has the right to influence and participate in the planning and delivery of services and decisions that affect them;
- Community engagement can improve working relationships between partners, and the relationship between partners and their service users;
- LSP partners and the voluntary and community sector can strengthen their role in community leadership;
- Potential issues arising from proposed changes to services can be identified and addressed;
- User satisfaction with services can be monitored over time, providing a useful performance indicator on improvements to the quality of services;
- Services can be targeted more closely on providing what people want, and avoiding what people do not want which will lead to an increase in take up of services;
- Improve compliance with the Comprehensive Area Assessment.
- Services can be prioritised in response to community needs: and
- We can make better use of the resources and expertise in the voluntary and community sector.

And then,

- Better community intelligence on the needs and aspirations of our communities will enable services to be targeted more closely to addressing the needs of these communities;
- We can use our understanding to ensure information, consultation and involvement opportunities are provided on the right issues, targeted at the right people, and accessible to those we are trying to reach; and in turn achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction
- Communities can be empowered to define their aims for their community and can support the development of locality-based solutions to neighbourhood issues;
- Local people can influence and be involved more in decision-making, rejuvenating the local democratic process;

- Community engagement can increase civic pride, pride of place and community cohesion;
- People will be able to transfer the skills and experience they gain from participating in community engagement activities to other aspects of their life;
- Participating in community engagement activities can help improve the health and well-being, particularly mental well-being, of individuals and the community;
- Local people will feel that LDLSP partners provide relevant and accessible engagement opportunities and will know how to get involved, either directly or through their elected representatives; and
- Providing information to communities helps the community to be better informed on how local services are delivered which can lead to an increase in satisfaction.

Aim of Community Engagement Strategy

The aim of this Strategy is to set out clear principles for community engagement in the Lancaster district to provide guidance for LDLSP partners to engage with all of its communities, to use the results of this engagement to develop more locally responsive policies and to deliver improvements in service delivery that are shaped by the communities that will be affected.

Objectives

To enable the planning and delivery of services, strategies and policies that reflect the needs of communities in the Lancaster district, the objectives of this strategy are to ensure that:

- There is a clear understanding of and commitment to community engagement across the LSP partners
- Communities have opportunities to shape and influence the development and delivery of quality services, and policies that reflect local needs and priorities.
- The tools in this Strategy are used as the basis of future activities to ensure they are properly conducted and provided flexibility and choice.
- Community engagement is carried out in a way that is timely, transparent, honest, and accessible to all, and is carried out in a co-ordinated and consistent approach.
- Our approaches to engagement and resources are proportionate to issues and likely benefits;
- We provide sufficient information to the community to enable them to participate meaningfully in the community engagement process;
- Community engagement is fully inclusive by providing opportunities for members of the community to express their views; to have these listened to with respect, and to receive feedback on the impact of their participation.
- The outcome of community engagement shapes decision-making and service delivery; and
- Feedback is provided to the community about the way their participation shaped the decisions we made.

How will we measure how successful we are?

This Strategy has nine Objectives and each of these will be measured against the most relevant indicators, as well as being checked for progress against individual partners' delivery plans. However, the following Local Area Agreement targets will be used as key measures.

Lancashire's Local Area Agreement (LAA) is a three-year agreement between the Lancaster district (via our Local Strategic Partnership) and central government. The LAA describes how local priorities will be met by delivering local solutions.

- Percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood (National Indicator number 2 Public Service Agreement (PSA) 21)
- Civic participation in the local area (National Indicator number 3 - PSA 15)
- Percentage of people who feel they can influence local decision making (National Indicator 4)
- Overall satisfaction with the local area as a place to live (National Indicator number 5)
- Percentage of people who believe that people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area (National Indicator number 1)

What is community engagement?

Community engagement can mean different things to different people, different communities and different services. There are many definitions of community engagement, but the one we have agreed to use in the Lancaster district is:

'The involvement of citizens, through locally based representative bodies and individually, in influencing and shaping those decisions which directly impact on their local environment and the quality of their daily life'.

We have designed this strategy to ensure we can provide the most appropriate means for all our communities to get involved and influence decisions that affect them.

This definition supports a broad range of activities that encourage an active two-way communication process between LDLSP partners and communities in the Lancaster district. Community engagement is an ongoing activity and it is important that community engagement is linked to decision-making. By taking account of community views, we will be able to make services more effective and responsive and we will be able to tailor them to meet the needs of users. Community engagement will help to give us a better understanding of the needs of different communities in the Lancaster district and how well we are meeting their requirements.

Types of community engagement

There are many different words used to describe community engagement – 'participation', 'involvement', 'consultation' and 'research' are just a few and they are often used interchangeably.

In the Lancaster district we have agreed to use five terms to describe different types of community engagement¹.

It is important that we use the appropriate terminology to identify the type of engagement we are doing. This will help stop confusion and will clarify the purpose of the activity. These types of engagement often overlap in practice and it may be necessary to use several types at once when planning and delivering community engagement activities.

¹ The ladder of empowerment (Every Voice Counts, 2008)
The Duty to Involve Making It Work (Community Development Foundation)

When we plan and carry out engagement activities in the Lancaster district, we will include one or more of following types of engagement from our ladder of participation and provide necessary support to enable engagement.

Informing

To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions

Our promise to the public: We will keep you informed

Consulting

To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions,

Our promise to the public: We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

Involving

To work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

Our promise to the public: We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspiration are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision

Collaborating

To work in partnership with the community on each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

Our promise to the public: We will come to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendation into decision to the maximum extent possible

Empowering

To place final decision-making and/or devolved budgets in the hands of the community.

Our promise to the public: We will support you in making decisions and deliver to you what you decided

www.peopleandparticipation.net, 2009

When we use the word 'participation', we mean that the community is actively taking part in one of the five engagement activities described above.

Research on the 'ladder of participation' suggest that engagement is a development process and that we should enable progression up the ladder so that isolated and disempowered individuals become empowered through the process of participation and those without social power can acquire it.

This development process will not suit everyone and it will be possible to disengage or re-engage at any stage.

There are important differences between these terms. It is therefore important that we use the correct terminology to identify the type of engagement we are doing. This will help stop confusion and will clarify the purpose of the activity.

Research with partners and stakeholders shows support to work together on the higher levels of the ladder.

What do we mean by communities?

Communities can be best defined as groups of people with something in common. These can be:

Community of place

People living in a neighbourhood and localities such as housing estates or villages. These locations will usually have defined physical boundaries.

Community of interest

A group of people with a shared interest or experience, which might cut across other communities. A community of interest includes service users (for example, people interested in climate change, members of a disability support group, patients registered with a particular GP, library users, pupils of a school).

Community of identity

A group of people with something in common - how people identify themselves or how they are identified by society, usually by demographic characteristics (for example, young people, religious groups, retirees).

A person will usually see themselves as belonging to a number of communities. This means that communities can be very diverse and we must give due consideration to this when we approach different communities. Some people may feel that they are not part of a community regardless of sharing some of the above characteristics. A lack of identity with a particular community should not result in exclusion from the decision making process affecting that community.

Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership Community Engagement Principles

We are committed to making sure all community engagement and consultation activity follows good practice guidance. To make sure this happens we have developed the community engagement commitments. These commitments should be followed when conducting all consultation or community engagement work.

Clarity of Purpose	Before beginning any engagement activity, we will be clear about why it is happening, what we want to achieve, who we are involving, what the community can and cannot influence, and how we will use the information gathered through the engagement activity.
Evidence Base	We will use all available research , knowledge and community intelligence to help us plan engagement activities. We will not carry out engagement activities if the information we need is already available.
Proportionate	We will make sure that our approach to engagement and resources is proportionate to the issue and likely benefits
Communication	We will target and tailor our communication by using a variety of accessible and inclusive ways to promote and provide information on engagement opportunities to our communities. We will also communicate internally to create joined-up engagement activities and avoid duplication of effort.
Timing	We will allow sufficient time to design and carry out engagement activities that are inclusive and encourage participation from all affected communities. We will also allow sufficient time to ensure that the results of engagement activities can shape our policies, plans and services to meet the needs and aspirations of our communities.
Partnership	We will adopt a co-ordinated approach to information provision, consultation and involvement and share relevant information and intelligence. This will allow us to appropriately target engagement activities and to create efficiencies, avoid duplication of effort and reduce consultation fatigue.
Integrity	We will always be open, honest, and accountable when explaining why we are engaging, sharing information and responding to contributions from all participants to avoid raising expectations.

Inclusive	We will support a variety of engagement activities to reflect the diverse needs of our communities; take account of local circumstances and will be responsive to the ways that the community wants to engage with us.
Action	We will listen to and take action on community views to ensure that local people influence our decision making and improve our service provision. We won't just pay 'lip service.'
Feedback	We will provide inclusive and accessible feedback to the community about the engagement activities we carry out and will explain how the community's input contributed to the decision-making process. We will explain how and when we will provide feedback to the community at the same time as we carry out the community engagement exercise.
Monitoring & Review	We will monitor and review the engagement activities we carry out to ensure that we take a partnership approach and use activities that are accessible to the target community and promote access to groups that are considered harder to reach, or who are seldom heard.