

Chesterfield Borough Council

Community Engagement Strategy 2014 - 2017



Putting our communities first



ARE WE ACCESSIBLE TO YOU?

If not, ask us

- ✓ We want everyone to be able to understand us.
- ✓ We want everyone to be able to read our written materials.
- ✓ We aim to provide what you need for you to read, talk, and write to us.

On request we will provide free:

- ✓ Language interpreters, including for British Sign Language.
- ✓ Translations of written materials into other languages.
- ✓ Materials in braille, large print, on tape, in Easy Read.

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INTRODUCTION FROM COUNCILLOR SHARON BLANK, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITIES

Welcome to Chesterfield Borough Council's Community Engagement Strategy 2014-2017. This Strategy brings together Chesterfield Borough Council's community engagement activities into one overarching framework for the Borough to better coordinate how we engage with our customers and communities.

The Strategy incorporates our community engagement standards including guidance on consultation subjects, timing, accessibility, transparency, and other practical considerations such as choosing the appropriate type of engagement and tools.

The Community Engagement Strategy recognises the diversity of our communities and the need to provide appropriate opportunities for customers and communities to participate and influence service delivery, decision making and policy development.

OUR AIM

The aim of the Community Engagement Strategy is to coordinate how we engage with our customers and communities based on our belief that:

- All communities should be given the opportunity to be involved in the decisions that affect them
- All communities deserve good quality services, shaped around their needs.
- Borough Council policies and strategies should reflect local priorities, requirements and aspirations.

WHY IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ESSENTIAL?

Community engagement is essential to support strong, active and inclusive communities. We need to understand the needs and aspirations of our local communities and listen and respond to local people. By developing and sustaining working relationships between public bodies, community groups and the wider community we can address the needs and issues experienced by particular communities. Community engagement is both the process and the result of working together to ensure the whole population influences the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Although the process is resource intensive (particularly in officer time) the benefits are innumerable.

Community engagement contributes to:

- Empowering local people to have control over their lives and help shape policies and services affecting them.
- Reducing inequalities and closing the gap between the most and least deprived areas of the Borough.
- Ensuring that services meet the needs of service users and that resources are used both efficiently and along agreed priorities.
- Ensuring that people understand the conflicting demands made on resources and priority setting and to help them develop their role in contributing to community well being.
- The promotion of engagement in local democracy not just electorally but also participatory
- Meeting statutory duties including those laid down by central Government such as the Equalities Act (Public Sector Equality Duty), Best Value Guidance (Duty to Consult), and Consultation Principles.

OUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STANDARDS

These service standards are a set of guiding principles that inform the way we carry out our community engagement activities. They incorporate the updated Consultation Principles Guidance (2013) which replaced the Code of Practice on Consultation (2008).

By ensuring that we adhere to these standards, we will support the Council's commitment to achieving high-level equalities standards. We have developed particular standards for some service areas including the Customer Involvement Agreement for Borough Council Tenants and in Planning Services, the Statement of Community Involvement. These are both available on our website www.chesterfield.gov.uk.

1. Our approach to consultation

Where specific standards are not in place, we will:

- Ensure that the objectives of any consultation are clear eg. to gather new ideas or test options.
- Only use community engagement and consultation processes when there is a real opportunity for people to influence and change decisions and services, and be honest where decisions are non-negotiable.
- Ensure that we always consult when there is a statutory requirement to do so, and where it is good practice to do so.
- Ensure that community engagement activities are realistic and that expectations are not raised unnecessarily or unrealistically.
- Provide leadership from Senior Management to ensure that community engagement influences services and plans.

2. When we will consult

We will:

- Coordinate community engagement activities at the council and with partners, to avoid duplication and 'consultation fatigue'
- Begin engagement early in policy development when the policy is still under consideration and views can genuinely be taken into account.
- Make sure that timeframes for consultation are appropriate to the nature and impact of the proposal (eg, the range of interested parties or complexity of the issue). Timescales may vary between two and 12 weeks.
- Establish the timing and length of consultations on a case-by-case basis and make sure they are realistic to allow stakeholders sufficient time to provide a considered response.
- Avoid consulting during holiday periods, where possible, and if not, make allowances within the timeframe.
- Avoid consultation exercises during the six-week period before local or national election periods.

3. How we will consult

We will:

- Consider the most appropriate type of engagement for each circumstance (see community engagement tools below). The type and scale of consultation will be appropriate to the potential impacts of the proposal.
- Ensure that the consultation captures the full range of stakeholders affected.
- Provide information in an easily understandable format, using plain language and clarifying the key issues.
- Ensure that we take into account particular needs and work together to overcome where possible any difficulties participants may have to enable them to fully participate in the activity.

- Ensure that, where appropriate, equalities monitoring takes place, and that survey data is broken down into ‘protected groups’ (eg. age, disability, gender etc). This will enable us to ensure that our services are fair and accessible to all groups. (The Policy Unit will give guidance on when equality monitoring is appropriate).
- Ensure that participation is voluntary, and that reasonable expenses will be reimbursed to ensure no one is excluded for financial reasons and that participants can withdraw at any time.
- Ensure that the rights and dignity of all participants are respected at all times, and give careful consideration to activities, information and questions to ensure that they do not offend, cause distress or embarrassment.
- Treat information confidentially, with particular regard to the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.
- Ensure adherence to health and safety regulations.

4. How we will feed back and be transparent

We will:

- Be open and transparent about the aims of community engagement activity and what stage of development the policy or proposal has reached.
- Be clear about what aspects of the policy or proposal being consulted on are open to change and what decisions have already been taken
- Ensure participants know what they are agreeing to take part in and how the information will be used.
- Make sufficient information available to stakeholders to enable them to make informed comments.
- Ensure that information obtained from community engagement activities is honestly interpreted, and enable participants to be part of the analysis process if they wish to.
- Publish consultation responses, including number of responses, and how they have been used within 12 weeks of the end of the consultation. If this is not possible, a public statement should explain why.
- Have clear processes to feed back on community engagement activity and outcomes and give reasons if unable to deliver on expectations in a timely manner and appropriate manner.

WHAT WE UNDERSTAND TO BE A COMMUNITY

A community is a group of people who share something in common. They can be:

- People living or working within a defined geographical area (for example a ward, neighbourhood or street)
- and/or
- People who share a particular identity or interest (for example people of a similar age, who have a disability, practice the same faith or are students) or are linked by a common issue (for example housing needs or specific project such as a park)

WHAT WE UNDERSTAND TO BE A STAKEHOLDER

Stakeholders are:

- The people or organisations that are affected by our policies and proposals
- The people or organisations that have an interest in its successful or unsuccessful conclusion.
- The people or organisations that have influence or power over our policies and proposals

The Council facilitates a number of established stakeholder groups, for example, Community Assemblies and the Equality and Diversity Forum.

PLANNING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Before any community engagement activity is undertaken within the Borough all those responsible for conducting the engagement must plan their activities, and complete a 'proposal to engage'. This is to reduce the amount of over consultation and engagement fatigue. The minimum level of research that should be undertaken covers:

1. Has this activity been undertaken before? Who with? What was the purpose of the original activity? Are the results of the activity available? Are the results of the original activity still relevant and recent? Can these results be used rather than repeating the engagement exercise? Look at findings from previous engagement and research. We can access data and community engagement methodologies from a range of organisations.
2. Is anyone else planning an engagement event that could be combined? Review the calendar of engagement events and activities which highlights all the Council's consultation and engagement events with employees and the community.
3. If a new engagement exercise is needed then who should be included? Have all the potential communities affected by the service or decision been considered?
4. Have all the types of engagement described in the next pages been fully considered and a full range of engagement tools explored to maximise inclusion?
5. Is there a legal duty to engage, and if so, are particular methods, timescales and stakeholders identified?
6. What resources are available?

TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT

In order to improve the quality of community engagement within the Borough, we recognise different ways by which people can influence decision making. There are a number of types of community engagement, including:

Information giving: Communities are provided with information on public services, including how to access them, their performance, future changes, and progress on issues affecting them. Input from the community only occurs if an individual chooses to contact the organisation.








Community consultation: A process of dialogue that leads to a decision where the views of a community should be taken into account. Decision makers ensure they have taken into account all views and information before reaching a decision.

Community involvement: People are involved in the design and development of community activities and services in cooperation with organisations. People who use services have a say in decisions about the purchasing, provision and monitoring of services. This requires more input from the community as people will need to play an active role within the decision-making process.

Devolved responsibility: Like community involvement but also includes a responsibility for the community to deliver the activities, actions and services agreed by the decision-makers. This requires the greatest amount of community input.

CBC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

The following community engagement tools and methodologies are used:

<p>1. Opinion Meter</p> 	<p>The opinion meter is a free-standing touch screen electronic device for simple, short questionnaires and polls. It can be used in a variety of public locations but is particularly successful in reception areas, and for younger audiences.</p>
<p>2. Activote</p> 	<p>Activote is an electronic voting system. There are a number of ways in which we use this voting software including Community Assemblies voting, team meetings, away days, staff training, public meetings, focus groups, budget and priority setting meetings etc.</p> <p>When Activote is used, attendees are asked questions via an electronic presentation. Each attendee is given a hand-held voting device to respond to the questions, and feedback is given instantly. Responses can be anonymous.</p>
<p>3. Electronic Surveys</p> 	<p>In 2012/13 we invested in the highly efficient survey data, data capture and analysis tool, SNAP. This software can be used to produce online questionnaires suitable for a variety of stakeholders. Web surveys are hosted on an external server and can be developed for use with PCs, laptops, tablets and Smart phones.</p>
<p>4. Paper Surveys</p> 	<p>SNAP is also used to create paper surveys which can then be scanned for automatic data capture. The same survey can be produced in a number of different formats (eg, paper, web) with all of the responses collated together for analysis.</p>
<p>5. Focus Group and Informal Meetings</p> 	<p>Representatives from a range of services are trained in focus group facilitation. Focus groups, workshops and informal meetings are used with employees, partners and the wider public where qualitative information is gathered in an interactive session.</p>
<p>6. Mobile Housing Office</p> 	<p>The mobile office is used to engage with tenants and residents locally. The mobile office enables us to consult flexibly and can be quickly deployed to speak to people about current issues on estates.</p>
<p>7. Other 2 way communications</p> 	<p>There are a range of other ways that the public can take part in two-way communication and engagement with the Council, including: the CBC website, online petitions, using the Council's CCCs system (Comments, Complaints, Compliments and Enquiries), via social media and other apps.</p>

COMMUNITY ASSEMBLIES

The Community Assemblies were launched in 2013/14 as a new community development and engagement programme. The Community Assembly approach is a move away from a traditional meeting-focused forum to a year round engagement and development programme linked to existing and emerging structures. There are four Community Assemblies in Chesterfield Borough: North, South, East and West.

Each Community Assembly area is allocated funds to support small local projects through its 'Minor Grant' scheme. In addition, the Community Chest funds projects that contribute to the Community Assembly Action Plan priorities that have been developed by participants.

ENGAGEMENT WITH SCRUTINY AND THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The Council has three Overview and Scrutiny Committees made up of the Council's Elected Councillors. The Overview and Scrutiny function has a strong community leadership role to act in the interests of the Chesterfield community. Through their scrutiny role, Scrutiny Committee Councillors will help ensure the Council makes the best decisions it can for local people. The role involves scrutiny councillors engaging with our communities to help ensure views and concerns can be represented as part of the decision making process.

Our Overview and Scrutiny Committees develop and work to adopted work programmes and where possible try to involve communities directly to provide local people with the opportunity to influence the Council's scrutiny work.

CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT AGREEMENT FOR TENANTS

Chesterfield Borough Council's Housing Service is committed to customer involvement. Customers are at the heart of all services and integral to decision making. It is only through customers' input, views, challenge and support that we can continue to develop and improve services.

Where appropriate, tenants are consulted on:

- Any decision we make which will affect homes or neighbourhoods
- How we monitor services and improvement plans
- How our services can be improved
- Estate improvement projects

There are a range of ways for all of our customers to get involved at a level that is comfortable and convenient to them. Our Customer Involvement Agreement describes the ways that customers can influence, shape and scrutinise Housing Services and how we will support customers to get involved.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY?

The Council's Community Engagement Group which includes elected members and officers from a range of different services will be responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the strategy. The group will produce an annual review of Community Engagement activity.

OUTCOMES AND MONITORING

It is important for us to know whether we are achieving our aims for this Community Engagement Strategy and we will use a variety of methods to measure this, including:

- Reporting on the following measures (via Are You Being Served questionnaire) and setting appropriate targets:
 1. Overall satisfaction with the local area as a place to live
 2. % of people who feel that they belong to their local area
 3. % of people who feel they can influence decisions in their local area
 4. % of people that would like to be more involved in the decisions that affect their local area
 5. % of people who feel local public services act on the concerns of local residents
 6. % of people who feel CBC and partners promote the interests of local residents
 7. % of people who think Chesterfield Borough Council keeps residents well informed about the services and benefits it provides
 8. % of people that agree that people in the local area pull together to improve the local area?
 9. Satisfaction with the way CBC runs things
 10. Perception of value for money CBC provides
- Monitoring, managing and reporting on the performance of this strategy and action plan in the Council and to elected members, partners and the public.
- Breaking down data (where possible and appropriate) for protected equality groups including gender, ethnicity, age and disability.
- Sharing experience and progress through local and regional networks e.g. the Derbyshire Community Engagement Group.
- Acting on feedback from our inspections and external assessments of performance.