

CITY-WIDE CONSULTATION STRATEGY: A STRATEGY LED BY DERBY CITY COUNCIL FOR THE LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Introduction

This document is the result of extensive collaborative work with departments within the Council and with external Partners. The main principles for a consultation strategy were initially agreed by a 'think tank' of representatives from all council departments. This group recognised the need to include external partners in the process of consultation and in the development of the city-wide consultation strategy.

Between September and December 2001, four groups of people including external partners from Health Services, the Police and the Voluntary Sector, worked on four main elements of the strategy: participation, diversity, co-ordination and marketing.

Since these meetings, and the resulting document, the Council has established an Area and Neighbourhood Team to engage with local communities. This document describes a framework of participation and consultation. The combination of these two activities should result in a fully inclusive planning process.

Structure of this document

The first part of this document describes the:

- vision and aims of the strategy
- quality indicators
- meaning of consultation at different 'levels'.

The second part is about implementing the strategy. It covers:

- implementing the strategy as a partnership initiative
- taking part: diversity and developing capacity
- better communications
- linking the Strategy to political and managerial systems.

If this strategy is adopted then partners will implement it by...

- Adopting the quality standards.
- Participating in consultation planning to agree an annual programme.
- Using the 'Mainstreaming tool' to develop systematic social inclusion.
- Adding findings to a shared data bank.
- Evaluation of process and findings.
- Sharing resources to support partner's consultation projects.
- Accepting formal agreements for working together.

CITY-WIDE CONSULTATION STRATEGY

PART A:

1. VISION AND AIMS

The vision and aims of the City-Wide Consultation Strategy need to be developed further by the Local Strategic Partnership LSP. Until then, we need to agree that the vision is about...

- Consulting with residents*.
- Providing information and process to enable residents of Derby to describe their needs and aspirations.
- Being socially inclusive and aiming to remove barriers to taking part.
- Linking with other work in the council and with partners to encourage people to think about their neighbourhoods and city.
- A quality controlled approach to consultation.

*We recognise that communities are made up of many stakeholders including residents, businesses and services providers. However, this part of the strategy is about consulting with residents. It should be extended to businesses and other stakeholders in time.

The aim of the consultation strategy is to support a useful and productive dialogue between the Council, its partners and the people who live in Derby.

The vision will be achieved by:

- creating a partnership approach to consultation
- developing a quality framework for consultation and adopting an ongoing monitoring and evaluation approach to support continuous improvement
- co-ordinating a consultation programme to limit the intrusive impact on local people and maximise the impact of the information that is obtained
- managing the information that is obtained through consultation to avoid duplication of effort and ensuring that decision makers at all levels have access to information on the opinions of local people and communities
- encouraging the participation of local people in the development of Council policies and services and in decisions affecting the city through excellent communications, best practice, supportive training and effective information systems

- developing an expertise in socially inclusive practice
- responding fully to statutory duties to consult

2. GROUND RULES OR QUALITY STANDARDS

The LSP agrees guidelines to set standards and assess the quality of the exercises. The level at which the guideline is applied should be appropriate to the task and method of consultation used.

Fairness:

- everyone affected by the consultation needs to feel that their interests have been taken into account or at the very least that they have been able to have their say
- the process is open, with no privileged access to information or taking part
- appropriate targeting of local people and organisations, including hard to engage people.

Resources:

- there is no cost to residents who participate in the process
- the fullest participation is encouraged by addressing barriers to taking part.

Supporting informed participation:

- participants have sufficient time to respond
- sufficient information is provided for people to make informed contributions
- there is a named contact for further information or explanation.

Conditions:

- clear information is provided about what people gain by being involved
- service providers are honest and open about the scope and range of the consultation
- be clear about how the information gained from consultation will be used in decision-making processes
- conditions of participation are clear eg how to make objections and complaints.

Confidentiality:

- participants will be told if any part of the information which they provide will be used to identify them personally
- data protection protocols are implemented and monitored.

Feedback is given:

- feedback is provided about the outcomes of the consultation . This can be indirect feedback, for example through an Area Panel meeting, but the method of feedback is made clear at the outset of the consultation process.

Process is monitored:

- the information sought is not already available
- the process and outcomes are monitored against performance indicators to assess effectiveness.

Unsolicited feedback:

- there need to be mechanisms to make it possible to act on unsolicited complaints, enquiries, requests and ideas.

3. MEANING OF CONSULTATION AT DIFFERENT 'LEVELS'

The potential scope of this Strategy is very broad. It applies whenever information is sought to improve our comprehension of local needs or service delivery. It is necessary to have clear terminology. A full glossary of consultation terminology will be developed as the strategy is implemented.

The key to applying quality standards is understanding the depth or level of participation that results from different types of consultation. This will be covered in detail in the Strategy toolkit. In summary, the terms used in this strategy are....

Consultation	Used very broadly to indicate an intention to learn from, and/or be influenced by others.
Information provision	Letting others know about policies, services, decisions or activities. Providing information can be part of a consultative process but is not, in itself, consultation.
Research	When information is sought without any intention to involve the participants in decision making processes.
Involvement and development	This refers to an ongoing 'relationship' with the Council and it's partners. When representatives, groups or communities are included in developing an area of policy, it infers that the participants should have an expectation that their views will influence outcomes. It suggests that participants may need access to information or other resources to help them.

Sharing decision making and implementing proposals

This is an ongoing relationship that involves more power sharing and trust. It applies to joint decision-making and policy implementation.

PART B:

4. IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY AS A PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

The consultation strategy has been developed through a partnership approach with agencies committed to joint working and co-operation. We recognise that organisations have different levels of skills and experience. Some agencies/departments have very high degree of skill, including research and analysis, while others have built up their skills and information base through contact with local people or groups.

It is proposed that we identify consultation skills within each organisation and, where mutually beneficial, have a process for sharing skills, resources, information and expertise. This can be better achieved through formal agreements or protocols.

The co-ordination process should:

- a. co-ordinate consultation across the city
- b. offer advice and assistance on the appropriate methods for consultation such as developing questionnaires, running focus groups and validate the selected process
- c. maintain and share data collected by all the key organisations
- d. establish quality standards for conducting consultation, monitor and evaluate process to aid continuous improvement
- e. provide training to conduct meaningful consultation
- f. create databases and or networks within the city for consultation
- g. create funds for good practice.

Each of these points is expanded below:

a. Co-ordinate consultation across the city

With more and more people undertaking consultation on similar issues and on occasions with similar groups of people, there is a growing danger of duplication and consultation fatigue. To avoid this, we propose to prepare an annual consultation plan with partners for significant consultation exercises, which affect large parts of

the city. Each item in the plan should be programmed for mutual support. The advance plan could be publicised to encourage participation.

Smaller consultation exercises might benefit from partnership working and could also be included in the advance plan. The Strategy does not preclude these but, to begin with, will concentrate on the major shared exercises, which are part of the annual programme.

Under the Council's new political management structure, and in partners' planning processes, decisions that require consultation have to be identified at planning stages. An annual plan would help to programme this process. Implications for consultation need to be incorporated into partners' reporting systems.

The co-ordination would be the responsibility of an Implementation Group made up of representatives of different parts of the council and partner organisations. A 'cascade' process for communicating the work of the group would be adopted as part of a communications plan.

b. Offer advice and assistance on consultation

We need to develop an expertise and work towards excellence. This means that practical and technical support should be available to people undertaking consultation. Support should be available in:

- selection of appropriate methodology
- validation of tools
- process
- analysis.

c. Maintain and disseminate data collected by all the partners

Agencies already hold large amounts of information, some of which is already being shared on an informal basis. There is a need to establish formal agreements/ protocols for sharing information to reduce duplication and save money. This will also help to reduce consultation fatigue suffered by members of the public from being repeatedly asked for the same information.

We need to establish mechanisms to ensure that current information is readily accessible to those that require it. This could be an independent web-site for the partnership or part of the Derby Observatory that is being considered. The information will be collected from a variety of local, regional and national sources.

In order to share information, we need to have confidence in the data, agree common formats, and comply with the Data Protection Act.

d. Establish quality standards for conducting consultation

Organisations need to evaluate their consultation activities to develop and share best practice. Consultation projects will be monitored on quality standards for participation and effectiveness. Good practice will be prepared to be shared and used in professional development.

e. Provide training to conduct consultation

People have different level of skills and experience and much to learn through reflection with each other. A skill bank, or core, of experts and practitioners could be developed through training and on-going skill development. The Partnership could become self sufficient in preparing questionnaires, running focus groups, public meetings, surveys, planning for real etc.

Depending on the level of demand, training could be delivered in-house or linked with other training programmes.

f. Support networks within the city for consultation

The partnership could create/support databases of customers, clients and stakeholders who could be accessed in various ways to participate in consultation. These databases would include...

- Full community and voluntary sector.
- Agreements for working with umbrella bodies.
- Special interest Groups eg Derby Women's Network, Older and Young People's Forum.
- Advisory Committees.
- Citizen's Panel/Derby Pointer.
- Area Panels.
- Health sector stakeholder groups.

g. Budget for good practice

We need to recognise that consultation can be costly. It is possible that an in-house service would be more cost efficient than the current reliance on outside agencies.

The budget would need to cover:

- costs of social inclusion
- marketing
- costs of carrying out exercises
- publicity and feedback costs
- data collection and management.

Budgets for consultation should be built-in from the beginning of the process and not seen as an add-on. This is especially important for ensuring good, socially inclusive practice.

5. TAKING PART: DIVERSITY AND DEVELOPING CAPACITY

This section is about making sure that people feel able to take part in consultation and seeking views from people who are 'hard to engage'. The Strategy needs to avoid authenticating majority views by adopting a process to identify diversity and consider a full range of views.

Consistent information collection will help the LSP to build a picture of the concerns and needs of all population groups. However, people who are 'hard to engage' may also need help to make the most of their participation.

It is important that people who we want to consult with are aware of:

- why we are asking for their views
- any background information they might need
- how they can contribute
- how they will benefit from giving us their views.

Consultation should be a two way process with topics arising from both 'bottom up' and 'top down' directions. Consultation should always be focused and relevant.

Careful planning will help us to identify those people who are likely to have a view on a particular topic. The strategy toolkit gives you ideas about this.

The strategy will endorse a technique known as Mainstreaming, for ensuring social inclusion in consultation.

The Strategy toolkit will offer advice on implementing a Mainstreaming approach. In brief, it requires an understanding of how disadvantaged people are affected and provides a systematic way of seeking their views in order to improve access to . . .

1. **Taking part:** in democratic/consultation processes.
2. **Resources:** allocation of resources and access to resources.
3. **Norms and values:** what expectations do we have which result in inequality.
4. **Human rights:** clear statements of rights.

Each consultation exercise will be required to target actual or potential customers who might otherwise be missed because they experience real or perceived barriers to participation. A check-list would include people who:

- do not speak English as their first language

- are hidden to service providers
- have care responsibilities
- experience discrimination
- have no fixed address or are part of transient communities.

Having identified groups of people who may find it difficult to take part, we must be careful not to discourage them, by using them too often or by using inappropriate methods.

Here are some suggestions for making sure people feel able to take part...

- Getting out of pocket expenses and meeting fees.
- Having accessible venues for all meetings and at appropriate times.
- Providing interpreters.
- Making sure any written material is provided in a range of formats.
- Making sure people understand how they need to respond to you. Some people need additional help with understanding paperwork.

The toolkit gives more information on this.

Developing capacity

Low turn-outs at elections and low response rates to our requests for information can suggest that the public is not concerned or interested. This Strategy needs to create the conditions that encourage people to take part. We need to recognise the issues behind low participation, such as:

- people feel decisions have already been made
- people lack confidence in organisations' willingness to listen to them
- inappropriate and hard to understand methods which put people off
- unfamiliarity with style and content.

The Strategy toolkit will include a list of suggestions from people asked to tell us what good consultation would feel like to them. The principles at the start of this document outline good conditions for participating.

Having got people to participate once, it is necessary to create a good impression and build an open and trusting relationship with them. Key to this is providing some feedback about the process and its outcomes. People may need to feel that they have 'engaged' with the Council, taken part in something that matters. In any case, as a democratic organisation, we seek to foster a good relationship with local people.

Some groups may benefit from additional support to articulate a view. There is a point at which consultation techniques and community development are very similar. The Council is strengthening its community development resources. The Strategy could address the role of these workers in Neighbourhood Trusts, Forums, Area Panels etc. and the Citizenship curriculum in schools, to provide information, advocacy and training to support local people's participation in a range of consultation issues. It is in the Council and partners interests to sustain networks of harder to reach people in order to consult them.

Finally, people are more able to participate if they have been able to prepare. The strategy should include publication of advance notice of forthcoming consultations.

Employee participation

We should be aware of the potential of employees to support and help customers and clients. Without asking employees to speak exclusively for local people, we can ask them to contribute to consultation projects by sharing the feedback from customers.

6. BETTER COMMUNICATION

The Strategy needs a communications plan to support local people fulfil their role as participatory citizens. Not only do we need to make sure that information about each consultation project follows the guidelines but also that there is a general effort to increase people's understanding and willingness to participate.

In addition to providing information and 'feedback', the Partnership needs to market its intention to seek and respond to local views. We need not only to listen, but to demonstrate that we are listening. The LSP may wish to 'badge' its consultation strategy and to market 'quick wins' and other successes to create positive messages.

The strategy should consider innovative ways of getting instant access to partnership members to make communications from citizens easier.

We need to consider an on-going opportunity for communication such as the web-site, radio programme, or newsletter. We should use Networks, Area Panels, Forums, Neighbourhood Trusts etc as opportunities for on-going consultation.

The Strategy toolkit needs to include advice on communicating with local people about particular consultations. These are linked to quality consultation standards and would cover areas such as:

- explaining the purpose and process
- selling the benefits
- explaining conditions
- offering incentives

- offering contacts
- describing the scope of the project
- timescales and decision making processes
- how feedback will be provided.

The strategy toolkit needs to provide a media map of opportunities for communicating with local people. This map should include forms of communication that we can join, such as Umbrella Body newsletters. We can use the partnership to extend our opportunities for communications. However, there should be some co-ordinated control about how this is achieved to prevent fragmented and over-demanding use.

7. LINKING THE STRATEGY TO POLITICAL AND MANAGERIAL SYSTEMS

This section is linked to co-ordination and communication. It is about creating connections inside the partnership and partnership organisations so that information can reach effective destinations.

Unsolicited feedback

All of the work of Forums, Trusts, Area Panels and Member's Surgeries etc creates an opportunity for people to **raise** issues and concerns. The 'instant access' communication suggestion would lead to further unsolicited comments. Often the people making the comment do not know who exactly they should be speaking to. The strategy needs mechanisms for collecting this information or issues and getting it to the places where it can be useful or responded to.

This mechanism should include a tracking element to be able to check on progress and support scrutiny.

Each comment is an opportunity to make a link between a local citizen and their councillor. At the very least, the caller should learn the name of their Ward Councillor and the Councillor informed of the issue. In some cases, the Councillor may want to adopt the issue.

Annual programming

Consultation is part and parcel of service development and review. An annual consultation programme, linked to the Policy Framework and including topics raised elsewhere will be developed by an Implementation Group and endorsed by the Cabinet and LSP Board. The diagram in Appendix 1 shows the cyclical planning process to illustrate how the Consultation Strategy Links into Decision Making Process.

This programme will make it easier to identify consultation opportunities in ongoing Forums, Panels, Stakeholder meetings etc. It will be possible to maximise efficiencies by linking or combining different topics for consultation. The programme will be reported to Area Panels and promoted to invite comments or participation.

This programme, along with work carried out by the Area and Neighbourhood Team, should eventually become the 'backbone' of the Community Planning Process.

Role of councillors

Councillors will continue to champion the needs and concerns of their constituents. The Strategy will provide a lot of information about specific areas or groups and councillors need access to this information. If information is relevant to their ward or responsibilities, they should be told.

This extended role of councillors means that all Partner agencies should inform the Council of issues that are raised so that councillors may be kept up to date.

Councillors should be informed about plans to carry out consultation in their wards and, if the methodology is appropriate, given an opportunity to participate.

Similarly, councillors may wish to be involved at feedback stages.

Councillors should be informed of the results of consultation analysis. When their wards are affected, they should be included in the interpretation of findings.

Councillors will need training and information to help them to understand the Strategy, access the data-base and play a role in facilitating events.

Role of Boards

Partner agencies need to suggest similar principles for their Board Members.

Role of employees

Every employee within the partnership must understand the consultation strategy at a level which is appropriate for them. Everyone should know how local people can make contact and how to pass comments from customers on.

Cyclical Planning Process to illustrate how the Consultation Strategy Links into Decision Making Process

