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**Executive**

**28 April 2009**

Report of the Chief Executive

# Listening, informing and working together: **York's Community Engagement Strategy**

## **Summary**

1. This strategy is designed to make sure that City of York Council and the Local Strategic Partnership can understand what people want and need from us. It is a response to a number of drivers, especially the new Duty to Involve and (for the council) the Single Improvement Programme (SIP).
2. This report presents the strategy at Annexe A and summarises the consultation process the council has gone through, detailed in Annexe B.

## **Background and key drivers**

3. York has a good reputation for community engagement but it is important that we continually improve what we do. The drivers for the strategy are:
  - we want to be sure our services are responsive and meet the needs of our communities, as our communities have a right to know and to have their say
  - we want to be sure our services and policies anticipate future concerns, reasonable aspirations and needs
  - we want active and involved citizens, participating in decisions and shaping services so that they feel that policies and services reflect this involvement and are tailored to local needs
  - we want to be sure that information, consultation and involvement opportunities are provided on the right issues, targeted at the right people in an accessible way
  - we want to have a corporate approach to providing information, consulting and involving, which flows through the organisation from

strategic policies to the individual service delivery, and that this is coordinated with partners

- we want to be sure there is no duplication of effort or risk of overloading stakeholders with uncoordinated engagement.

4. The context for this strategy has been as follows:

- The Comprehensive Performance Assessment said that while there were examples of good engagement, there was an absence of a systematic approach within the council. As a direct response, the council has put new emphasis on engagement by including it in the Single Improvement Plan. In addition, the proposals for the new Comprehensive Area Assessment focus on outcomes of engagement across the city, highlighting the importance of a coordinated approach across the council and city partners. The assessment will look at the process and impact of engagement to delivering empowered residents.
- The Duty to Involve (see point 6 below) comes into force in April 2009. The duty is set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
- The effective implementation of the new duty will at least in part be assessed by a national indicator, NI14 – the percentage of people who feel that they can influence decisions in relation to the area within a 15-20 minute walk from their home. The council has agreed to the LSP recommendation that NI14 is included as a key measure in the Local Area Agreement. To support the information collected by the Place Survey on this indicator, the Government Office have also developed a framework for NI14. This places a great expectation on quality engagement that leads to an involved population who can influence decisions of the council and our partners. NI14 asks ten key questions (Annexe D). The strategy and toolkit aims to deal with the majority of these issues.
- Research in recent years through the residents' opinion survey and has shown a majority of people feel they do not get enough information. In last years' survey less than half (45%) feel the council keeps them very or fairly well informed. Only 37% are satisfied with the opportunities for participation in local decision-making provided by the council, although 45% do not express a strong opinion one way or the other. Around 20% of all respondents would like to be more involved in decisions with another 66% wanting to be, depending on the issue. However, 14% would not like to be more involved in such decisions.

5. The Executive received a paper in December 2008, detailing the work up to that point on the engagement strategy and asking members approval to finalise the strategy and toolkit. Members approved that the strategy should contain:

- a. a set of principles that should form the basis of a strategy intended to be published electronically

- b. a toolkit to deliver the strategy as a user-friendly online document.

## **Legislative context - the Duty to Involve**

6. The Duty to Involve has three component parts: provision of information, consultation, and involvement.

### *a. Provision of information*

Provision of information should support communities to have their say and get involved 'where appropriate'. This goes beyond standard information on services and must be provided in a way that can be easily accessed and understood. It is important that stakeholders are aware of what the council and our partners are doing, both in the services they use and the services they don't. More than this we need to ensure people have the information required to have informed opinions on the development of those services. Finally, we need to make sure that all communication is in language appropriate to the audience.

### *b. Consultation*

Consultation allows people to have their say about the decisions and services that affect them, providing genuine opportunities for people to be involved. The distinction between research and consultation is that research is the collection and analysis of data to provide greater understanding, whereas consultation is a process of dialogue that leads to a decision. In good consultation the public should be aware of the different options available, the pros and cons of these, background information, how decisions are made and who by, and how views will shape that decision.

### *c. Involvement*

Involvement gives people greater influence over decisions or delivery. It can include:

- working with us in designing policies and being involved in the commissioning of services
- carrying out some aspects of services such as looking after a community centre, street clean ups or environmental conservation work
- working with us to assess services through mystery shoppers and as co-opted members of committees.

## **The consultation process**

7. Details of the results of the consultation process are outlined in Annxe B.

The process involved:

- an extensive round of 1-1 meetings with interested parties
- a website consultation

- self-assessment
- review of other councils' approach to engagement
- review of the national guidance

### **Meetings with representative groups**

8. As part of the formal consultation process, 1-1 meetings were held with the following groups. The views expressed are included in Annexe B.
  - Higher York (for the views of higher education in the city)
  - York Council for Voluntary Service
  - NHS North Yorkshire and York (formerly North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust)
  - Healthy City board
  - York Business Forum
  - Mental Health Forum
  - York Racial Equality Network
  - York People First
  - York Older People's Assembly
  - York LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) Forum, Yorkshire MESMAC
  - York Inter Faith Forum

### **Website consultation**

9. The draft strategy and toolkit was published on the council's website in December 2008 when the progress report was presented to members. It was republished on the consultation part of the council's website 'consultation finder' on 13 February, to run for a further consultation period of one month. Four comments were received.

### **Self-assessment**

10. Work has been steered by an Engagement Reference Group of council officers from all directorates and levels of seniority. In addition there has been a workshop of senior managers and the views of key officers were sought on a 1-1 basis.
11. Councillors were consulted in two ways: through a workshop with members from each political party in November 2008 and via email in February 2009.
12. As well as the steering group, meetings were set up with the key internal contacts from council directorates who have an especially strong interest engagement – Neighbourhood Services, City Strategy, HASS and LCCS.
13. Corporate Management Team was consulted on 11 March for their views on the strategy and toolkit. Their comments have been incorporated into both documents.

## **Role of the Local Strategic Partnership**

14. Other local authorities have agreed a joint approach to engagement through their LSPs, with shared principles for all of the members as an overarching engagement framework. Following consultation over earlier drafts of the strategy, the Without Walls Board has agreed to adopt the strategy as a joint piece of work.

## **Review of other councils' approach to engagement**

15. As part of our consultation and research we reviewed other councils' engagement strategies including Manchester, Knowsley and Newcastle. The model most other authorities have adopted is a strategy and toolkit approach. Most authorities have looked to engage along with their respective LSPs, with the LSP being the owner of the strategy.

## **Engagement strategy and toolkit**

16. The strategy and toolkit are being published as web pages on the council's website when the strategy is launched in May. This is to allow them to be cross-referenced and link to other pieces of engagement, both inside the council and from our partners. The toolkit also allows council staff and partners to see examples of good engagement drawn from previous activities and make sure there is duplication is kept to a minimum through the engagement calendar and engagement log.
17. A key element of the strategy is the statement of principles in the three defined area of engagement. These are as follows.

### *Principles of engagement - Informing*

18. Communities need to be in a position to know how to access services, so that they can have their say and get involved in influencing those services, decisions and policies. They need to have accurate and comprehensive information relating to when and how the council makes decisions affecting services and future policy.

The key principles of good communication are that it should be:

- open and transparent
- as accessible as possible to everyone in the community
- easily understood and up-to-date
- a two-way process where possible, so we can hear and understand residents' views
- coordinated, so that Without Walls or the council can speak with one voice
- easily and instantly identifiable as coming from Without Walls or City of York Council.

### *Principles of engagement - Consulting*

19. Consultation allows people to have their say about the decisions and services that affect them. It needs to provide genuine opportunities for people to take part, and for their views to be heard and acted upon. Consultation can vary from citywide surveys to direct dialogue such as focus groups and panels. The engagement strategy toolkit has good examples of existing consultation.

The key principles of good consultation are that it should:

- be meaningful, relating to a decision, service or policy that must be able to be affected by the results of the consultation
- have a clear purpose, saying why it is being carried out and how the results will be used, so that everyone understands what is being asked and why and how their involvement will influence the final decision.
- be well timed, so that decisions are informed at the earliest stage possible
- represent a balanced cross section of the local community, including those who work, live, visit and study in the city, as well as groups,
- organisations and businesses if that is appropriate be accessible in the way it is written and presented and in any venues used
- be co-ordinated and linked with other relevant services or partners to avoid 'consultation fatigue' and duplication of effort, time and cost
- be analysed and used to inform decisions, with clear feedback on what has changed as a result of the consultation provided to those consulted and the wider general public.

### *Principles of engagement - Involving*

20. Involving is the most interactive form of engagement, which is over and above being informed and consulted. It needs to give the ability for genuine influence over decision-making and delivery, and can include influencing or directly participating in decisions, co-designing or commissioning services and working with the council to judge how effective services are.

Individuals can be involved through expressing an opinion at (for instance) council meetings (publicised in the council's forward plan), working with us to design policies and services and actually carrying out some services - such as being mystery shoppers to assess service quality, or working with councillors through Scrutiny Reviews to look at services and policies.

The key principles of involvement are that it should:

- be the starting position rather than the exception, so that all services seek to include local people in the design of policies and services as matter of course
- encourage direct participation in decision making
- encourage aspects of services themselves to be delivered directly by the users of those services

- encourage individuals to work with Without Walls and the council in assessing services
- be inclusive and accessible
- be transparent so that it is clear how the involvement has fed into the final decision-making.

## **Equalities**

21. The council has a legal and moral obligation to cater for the needs of all residents and stakeholders as a matter of course, especially the six equalities 'strands' of age, gender, disability, race, religion/belief and sexual orientation. We want to make sure that council engagement is accessible to all parts of the community. Guidance is published to council staff by the council's equalities team in 'Making Connections - how to make communication accessible and inclusive' and a section in the toolkit 'making sure we leave no one out of our engagement' summarises this document.

## **Implementation**

22. In order to implement the standards and a consistent approach to engagement:
  - the Marketing and Communications team (m&c) will advise on coherence and coordination, and the customer service and governance team will give assurance that there is a consistent approach across the council
  - the m&c team will manage a log of engagement activity (informing, consulting and involving) and check the log for consistency and quality and ensure there is no duplication
  - an amendment to the report writing protocol will be added to acknowledge the importance of engagement and to request officers inform members ahead of every decision what engagement has taken place
  - an Equalities Impact Assessment of the strategy will be produced to address effective engagement with all of the six equalities strands
  - in response to the consultation process the m&c team will publish a simple accessible summary leaflet about the strategy for distribution to key groups, libraries and council offices
  - risks will be logged in the council's risk register and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they remain relevant
  - the strategy, toolkit and leaflet will be launched formally the week of 18 May.

## **Financial implications**

23. There are no extra resources available for engagement over and above what is already spent by the council. Instead the strategy aims to coordinate better the existing work on engagement, giving greater focus to the outcomes of our

engagement and show clearer action as the result of the more clearly defined principles of engagement.

### **Sustainability issues**

- 24. Better coordinated engagement will mean less duplication and therefore less paper in written documents used by the council in communicating and consulting
- 25. There is the potential for better engagement to add to the socio-economic viability of the city.

### **Legal**

- 26. There are no legal implications in this paper

### **Crime and Disorder**

- 27. There are no crime and disorder implications in this report

### **Information Technology (IT)**

- 28. The toolkit is a web-based document.

### **Property**

- 29. There are no property implications in this report.

### **Human Resources**

- 30. There are no HR implications in this report.

### **Other**

- 31. All other implications have been covered in the report.

### **Risk Management**

- 32. Risks will be logged in the council's risk register and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they remain relevant

### **Consultation**

- 33. The council's Corporate Management Team has been consulted on the strategy. Other consultation is outlined in the body of the paper and at Annexe B.

### **Recommendations**

- 34. Members are asked to comment on and approve the strategy.



## Contact Details

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Chief Executive

**Report  
Approved**



**Date**

16/4/09

**Specialist Implications Officers:**

NA

**Wards Affected:**

**All** ✓

For further information please contact the author of the report

**Annexes**

- A: *Listening, informing and working together* - York's Community Engagement Strategy
- B: External consultation record
- C: Proposed text for leaflet to be published with easy-read graphics
- D: National Indicator 14 Framework