

Shaping places, shaping services

Cambridgeshire County Council's approach to community engagement

Consultation Draft

1.0 Introduction

This strategy supports the County Council's vision for Cambridgeshire of creating communities where people want to live and work now and in the future.

It has been developed through consultation with our councillors, officers from across the Council's services and our partners, and is supported by a plan of action. It is part of a wider strand of work which will be developed over the coming year to ensure that we are supporting our communities to be as active, inclusive and cohesive as possible. This work will be defined in an overarching Community Cohesion Strategy.

Increasing the potential for local people to influence the development of their communities and the services provided in their area is a clear priority for central Government. Key themes of the 2008 White Paper *Communities in Control* include:

- **Promoting local democracy, by increasing understanding of the democratic process and the role of Councillors**
- **Promoting local accountability, developing mechanisms for local people to be able to raise issues with their local council**
- **Supporting local people to take a more active role in decision-making about local services**
- **Supporting local people to become more actively involved in their local area.**

2.0 What is the aim of this strategy?

This strategy aims to create stronger and more cohesive communities supported by responsive and enabling local authorities.

Our vision is for all people in Cambridgeshire to feel informed and have the skills and confidence to take part in decision-making. We want people to believe they belong to a community. We want communities to be able to shape their local area and the services they receive, whether they live in a rural community, a market town or in our cities.

We want everyone in our communities to have access to opportunities to engage in a way that suits them and meets their own needs. In developing our strategy, we have considered the needs of different groups and will ensure that the services we deliver do not discriminate in any way and that there is equality of access for all. We want our services and community engagement activity to be fair to all, but personal to each.

In achieving this vision, we believe the quality of life of the people who live and work in or visit Cambridgeshire will be improved across the county.



Cambridge Market Place

3.0 Why is community engagement important?

Local authorities are here to serve local people. Engaging communities should be an integral part of the way the County Council operates on a day-to-day basis. To provide services effectively, we have to know what local people want. Effective engagement with our communities therefore means better local government, and a better served local community. Benefits include:

- Ensuring more efficient and effective services that better reflect the needs of local people
- Higher levels of customer satisfaction
- Safer, stronger and more inclusive communities
- Greater numbers of people feeling they can influence decisions in their local area



Wisbech Market Place

4.0 What do we mean by community engagement?

Community engagement can mean different things to different people, different communities, and different councils. Community engagement is often described as the process of involving people in decisions that affect them. This can mean involving communities in the planning, development and management of services. Or, it may be about tackling the problems of a neighbourhood, such as crime, drug misuse or lack of play facilities for children.

There are a number of different ways of engaging people; these can be illustrated as a 'ladder' of participation:

Empowering	Supporting the local community to take action on its own & develop and implement its own plans
Involving	Deciding together and acting together with the local community
Consulting	Asking people what they think so that decision-makers can make better decisions
Informing	Giving people knowledge so that they can be informed

Every type of involvement is important and different methods will be used depending on circumstances - our aim is to move more towards involving and empowering communities wherever this activity will make improvements to places and services.

5.0 Where are we now?

In Cambridgeshire, community engagement is about making sure that there are opportunities for local people to get involved in ways which suit them. Below are some examples of what we are currently doing across the Council to ensure that communities are able to participate at various levels to influence service delivery, decision-making and change in their local area.

Informing

We publish a range of newsletters and leaflets to keep communities informed about our services, including 'Your Cambridgeshire', the County-wide magazine delivered to all households across the County. The Council's website also provides a wide range of information about all of our customer-facing services, highlighting the services on offer and providing links to useful information such as bus timetables and booking appointments with the Registration service. We have also recently re-launched a website to provide residents and communities in Cambridgeshire with easy online access to local information and services: www.cambridgeshire.net

We advertise services on our buses and the local radio, and issue regular information about road works through the web. Our Trading Standards team can often be seen out and about carrying out regular leaflet campaigns on topics such as how to avoid rogue traders at Christmas; while our Waste team run 'slim your bin' campaigns.



Consulting

We regularly consult communities across Cambridgeshire using a range of approaches. We have held a number of community consultation events based in the heart of local communities and in partnership with other services such as the Police, in the market squares of our towns and the cities.

One particular example of a plan we have consulted on is the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Big Plan. In 2005/06, 1800 young people were consulted, through groups focusing on children and young people with particular needs as well as countywide focus groups open to all children and young people. Families were also engaged through work in schools, web consultation and consultation documents in GP surgeries. When recently updating the Big Plan in 2009, the views of children and young people were used through ongoing participation work such as Agenda Days and Kids Aloud groups as well as through survey work and talking to the Youth Assembly.

Involving/ Participating

We work with neighbourhood management areas in Oxmoor (Huntingdon North), Eynesbury, Ramsey, Wisbech and surrounding areas. These programmes bring a wide range of partners together to work with local communities to identify and respond to the major issues in the area. The benefits of this work are huge - in Huntingdon North, results from the Household Survey tell us that residents feel the area is improving, and national data reveals that the area is less deprived than it was at the start of the neighbourhood management initiative.

We also work in partnership with colleagues in the Police and District Councils to deliver 29 Neighbourhood Panels operating across the county. We want to develop these so that they can further involve local people in raising and addressing local needs. Our parishes are increasingly developing parish plans which set out their vision for their community, and we are looking at ways of taking these parish plans into account in our planning processes. Other ways of involving people in decision-making include Youth Panels, where young people have a say in how funding is allocated to youth projects.



Empowering

In Huntingdonshire, we are carrying out two Participatory Budgeting Pilots which will involve the local community directly in making decision to fund local projects that meet their local objectives. We are also enabling young people to have the opportunity to choose which positive activities to spend their funding on through the pilot G2G card scheme.

We are developing opportunities for adults and children who need support to choose and design their own, individualised services. Using Personal Budgets, people are creating personalised packages of support that promote their independence; enable them to engage in meaningful activities; enable them to remain in their own homes as long as possible and to be active citizens within the community.

An example of an individual being 'empowered' to take control of a service they receive is set out below:

Case Study - In Control Total

Dev is a young man with learning disability who lives at home with his family. He has had a personal budget to spend on social care support for a year. Before receiving his personal budget Dev did not go out, did not take part in any activities and felt very low. He lacked self-confidence and self esteem, and his family life was being affected.

Dev's sister manages his personal budget which she says has changed the whole family's lives in a positive way: *'Dev now goes out horse riding, swimming and for regular walks. He also goes out with support from agency workers and this has helped improve his confidence and enabled him to do things without his family. In turn this has helped the family unit to be sustained and improved things for the family as well as Dev.'*

In future Dev would like to continue to do the activities he now enjoys, but also plans to try and experience new things. His support plan plans to use some of his personal budget to buy a computer for Dev to use at home to help his communication. Dev's family believe that a personal budget has been a fantastic move for him and has improved his quality of life immensely.



6.0 What are our priorities?

Working in partnership with Cambridgeshire Together, we have jointly agreed three priorities to focus on over the following years. These priorities are to:

- Increase the percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together
- Increase the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality
- Increase overall/general satisfaction with the local area

7.0 What are our objectives?

What we will do

1. Keep communities informed
2. Support people to be involved in their local communities
3. Promote local democracy
4. Support community involvement in shaping places
5. Support community involvement in shaping services

How we will do it

6. Improve our understanding of how our communities work
7. Coordinate our community engagement activity

8.0 What difference will this make?

We will know we have made a difference when any member of our community can say the following things:

“I know what’s happening in my local area and where to go if I want more information.”



“I feel like my view can make a difference and things can change as a result.”



“I’ve got everything I need to get involved in my community.”



We will also know we’ve been successful when any of our councillors or officers can say:

“Because we have such a strong understanding of our communities, the services we deliver genuinely meet people’s needs.”



9.0 How will we achieve our objectives?

An action plan has been developed which sets out how we will achieve these objectives and is available on request. Below are our priorities for each objective which will form the core of the action plan.

Objective 1 - Keeping communities informed

We will:

- Work to understand the information needs of people who live and work in or visit the County so that we provide the right information in the most accessible way and at the right time.
- Test the effectiveness of the communication methods we currently use and explore ways of using new web technologies to reach out to communities who are at ease in this medium, such as younger people, and those who may prefer to make their views known through 'virtual' communication rather than through attending meetings.
- Be clear about the purpose of communication and ensure that we feed back the results of consultation to communities.

Objective 2 - Supporting people to be involved in their local communities

We will:

- Work with and support our partners, particularly the Voluntary and Community Sector, to promote opportunities for involvement and volunteering in local areas.
- Promote the health improving, crime reducing and social well being effects of active communities in areas of greatest need

- Work with communities to ensure that those with social care needs are able to take a full part in community life.

Objective 3 - Promoting local democracy

We will:

- Develop ways to help our local communities understand local democratic processes more thoroughly, so that they understand what councillors do and the impact they can have.
- Encourage people to seek office and take part in local democracy at all levels.
- Support and make greater use of existing local government structures such as Parish Councils
- Support all of our councillors through a comprehensive councillor development programme to help them in their frontline community leadership role, to make themselves more visible in their local areas, and to further develop the skills they need to lead and to serve their communities fully.



Lode waterway

Objective 4 - Supporting community involvement in shaping places

We will:

- Ensure that relationships are built on the ground, face-to-face, between community groups and people living in the area as well as with councillors and officers from a range of organisations.
- Continue to invest in community development activities to help build the capacity of our communities so that they can release their own potential and engage fully in the opportunities available within their area.
- Develop our approach to neighbourhood management and neighbourhood panels by supporting parishes and neighbourhoods to develop their own plans, and agreeing with them how the Council could support them to deliver the actions they identify.
- Support Parish and Town Councils to become more representative of the communities that they serve.
- Provide opportunities for our communities to influence the spending of public money to improve their local areas, and investigate the potential for some communities to have control over specific budgets to deliver projects that meet their priorities.
- Work closely to support a thriving local Voluntary and Community Sector and ensure that the Voluntary and Community Sector perspective is represented at strategic decision-making levels. We remain committed to our Compact agreement to joint working with the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Objective 5 - Supporting community involvement in shaping services

We will:

- Ask people's views of their services through consultation, listen to those views and respond to them, whether it is to say that we can do what they ask, or are not able to, and if not, why not.
- Take a more active role in working with individuals and communities to decide which organisation is best placed to provide services for individuals, such as, for example, giving vulnerable adults more assistance to live independently.
- Strengthen our internal planning processes so that issues raised by the community make a real difference to the ways that we plan and deliver services.
- Make sure that we feed back the results on any involvement in developing our services so that people understand what difference their input has made.
- Give people an opportunity to have their say about whether what we've done has really made a difference to them, or whether there is further work we need to do.



Council Chamber, Shire Hall

Objective 6 - Improving our understanding of how our communities work

We will:

- Build on our existing knowledge of our communities through pulling together a range of data from sources including customer feedback systems, research, and the knowledge of our Councillors and officers working in the community, to build a 'map' of communities' needs.
- Ensure that we work with and understand the needs of underrepresented groups such as travellers, new arrivals and the minority and 'hard to hear' groups.
- Conduct regular surveys both to develop our understanding of our communities, and to track our performance in meeting targets for improving local people's satisfaction with Cambridgeshire as a place to live and work.

Objective 7 - Coordinating our community engagement activity

We will:

- Better support, coordinate and promote the community engagement work already underway across the county.
- Share best practice and promote opportunities for joint-working with partners, so that we do not 'over-consult' communities.
- Develop training and guidelines for all officers involved in community engagement activity.

10. How will we measure our achievements?

We will manage, monitor and report on the delivery of the action plan we have developed to support this strategy, which is available to download from

www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/communityengagementconsulation

We will also use our residents' survey to measure the achievement of our Cambridgeshire Together Local Area Agreement partnership priorities set out in section 6.

Our overall progress and efforts to strengthen our partnership work will be tested through external inspection mechanisms such as the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

The results of these assessments will be publicised widely to Councillors, partners and the public and our strategy will be reviewed and updated within this context. This will enable us to ensure that we effectively and flexibly respond to the changing needs of our communities over the coming years.



The Dog and Duck, Linton

Glossary

Community Engagement

- Means interaction between the Council and the local community, including individuals and groups in Cambridgeshire.

Community

- A term used to describe communities of place, communities of identity and communities of interest.

People can be members of several different kinds of community for different reasons:

- They may identify with the local area they live in when they are concerned with neighbours, housing and local services
- Their networks of friendship, family, identity, culture, faith, ethnicity, political commitment, colleagues or leisure interests may be rooted in their local area but equally may be spread across large areas.

Local Area Agreement (LAA)

- A Local Area Agreement (LAA) is a three year agreement between Central Government and a local area. The primary objective of an LAA is to set out the key priorities for the area and deliver better outcomes for local people.

Cambridgeshire Together

- Cambridgeshire's LAA partnership is called Cambridgeshire Together. The Cambridgeshire Together Board is made up of a number of representatives including members of the County Council, the District and City Councils, the Police Authority, the Health Authority, the Fire Service, the Voluntary and Community Sector, and the Business Sector.

Comprehensive Area Agreement (CAA)

- Comprehensive Area Assessment is an independent inspection made up of seven inspectorates:
 - Audit Commission
 - Commission for Social Care Inspection
 - Healthcare Commission
 - HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
 - HM Inspectorate of Prisons
 - HM Inspectorate of Probation
 - Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

Through CAA, these inspectorates will make a joint assessment of how well local authorities and other public sector organisations are influencing the outcomes for people in local areas and the future prospects of

sustainable improvement for those areas.

Compact Agreement

The Cambridgeshire Compact is a public statement of how the County Council and other statutory partners will work with the voluntary and community sector. It helps to ensure the establishment and development of stronger links between the voluntary sector and Council business.

In Control Total / Personal Budgets

- 'In Control Total' is a project for all adults living in Cambridgeshire who are eligible to receive social care support. It gives people who are eligible for support the opportunity to identify their own needs and plan how to meet them using a Personal Budget – a clear upfront allocation of funding.

Kids Aloud

- Kids Aloud is made up of four groups of young people aged between 5 and 11 who meet monthly to talk about issues that they feel are important to young people, and make sure the views of young people across Cambridgeshire are heard by County Councillors and council officers.

Neighbourhood Management

- Neighbourhood management is a way for communities within specific deprived neighbourhoods to work with local agencies to improve and have more say over their services at a local level.

Neighbourhood Panels

- Neighbourhood Panels are multi-agency public meetings, taking place in local areas across Cambridgeshire. County Councillors and officers attend the meetings. The aim of panels is to give local people the opportunity to influence the services they receive and to empower them to contribute to the development of their local community.

Participatory Budgeting

- Participatory budgeting (PB) directly involves local people in making decision on the priorities and spending for a defined public budget. This means engaging residents and community groups representative of all parts of the community to discuss and vote on spending priorities, make spending proposals, and vote on them, as well as giving local people a role in the scrutiny and monitoring of the process.