

Community Engagement Framework 2014 - 2017

Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership

August 2014

Partner logos (poss on front cover)

Forward from Strategic Board/Joint Delivery Team Chairs

Introduction

Under the terms of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, Public Sector organisations are required to engage with community bodies as part of the Community Planning process. In this context, the Act states that the main aim of community engagement should be to improve the planning and delivery of services by making them more responsive to the needs and aspirations of communities. Under the Act community engagement must involve consultation, co-operation and participation.

Effective community engagement is central to delivering services to suit those living and working in the Scottish Borders.

Scottish Borders Community Planning Partners are committed to improving the way in which we work together to ensure that we deliver the best service we can in the most effective way we can to suit the needs of the community we serve

An agreed framework will help us to deliver our engagement activities in a consistent, cost effective and transparent manner which will set out the minimum standards that our customers can expect to see. Where possible we will deliver these activities in partnership.

In the development of these principles current community engagement policies/strategies adopted by each partner have been studied and common elements, as well as those that are good practice, have been drawn out.

Each organisation has statutory obligations which may govern how it engages with the community. There is flexibility with the Framework to accommodate this.

Members of Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership are:

- Berwickshire Housing Association
- Borders College
- Eildon Housing Association
- NHS Borders
- Police Scotland
- Scottish Borders Council
- Scottish Borders Housing Association
- Scottish Fire & Rescue Service
- SESTRAN
- Skills Development Scotland
- South of Scotland Scottish Enterprise
- Third Sector, represented by the Third Sector Interface
- Waverley Housing

By working together where possible appropriate resources can be maximised and the possibility of consultation fatigue reduced.

Aims and Objectives of the Framework

- To strengthen partnership working
- To reduce duplication in engagement activity and increase capacity
- To create better understanding of engagement practices through a consistent approach

Co-ordination

In order to support this Framework, and joined up community engagement work, Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership will:

- Share information about planned activities.
- Inform the Partnership's Joint Delivery Team and relevant Programme Group(s) of consultations being undertaken, reporting back as and when required.
- Promote Partner consultations and other engagement activity through organisation specific mechanisms including websites where possible
- Scottish Borders Council will provide support, where required and appropriate, to Partnership engagement work.

What is Community Engagement?

Although there are many definitions for community engagement, real community engagement is a communication process between organisations and the community.

There are many terms that are used when describing community engagement, including consultation and involvement. However, each term refers to a variety of different methods. The method used will depend on the aim of the exercise. We should try to make sure that we use the right method for the activity we are carrying out.

Involvement – working with individuals and communities to develop options and make the decisions

Participation – engaging with individuals and communities in decisions that affect their lives

Consultation – presenting information for comment

Information – telling individuals and communities what we are going to do and why

Community engagement at all levels can be empowering when undertaken well.

It is important that in all communication Community Planning Partners should make it clear what the level of engagement is and what this means for the community.

Why should we engage?

Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership believes that through working with our communities we can deliver the services that meet local needs.

Effective community engagement provides a range of benefits to both Partner organisations and the community. It can:

- Empower people to plan and influence the future of their own community producing a greater sense of community spirit and pride.
- Help keep the community informed.
- Provide ways of measuring how satisfied the community is with Partner organisations and the services they deliver.
- Encourage people to get involved; if people can see that their views do make a difference they are more likely to become involved.
- Build a better relationship between the community and Partner organisations.
- Assist Partner organisations to identify what needs to be improved.

Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership's Key Principles of Community Engagement

The principles set out below have been developed by Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership to ensure a consistent standard for community engagement activity.

Clarity of Purpose

The reason for any engagement activity should be clearly identified in any documentation and communication.

Influence

State what is up for proposed change and how much influence consultees have on the outcome. Do not consult for the sake of it. If the decision has already been made, say so. It is important that consultations are genuine, it is perfectly acceptable to say when something is being provided for information only, not doing so can cause bad feeling between the organisation and consultees creating a lack of trust and dissatisfaction which may result in people being less likely to participate in future consultations.

Resources

Both human and financial resources are required to undertake community engagement whether it be for staff to attend a meeting or the provision of catering. All known costs should be identified, and provision made for unexpected costs, when planning any engagement activity.

Training

Training should be provided to enable staff understand the importance and benefits of community engagement and how it can support them in their work.

Partner organisations provide community groups, such as tenants' organisations with training required that will help them participate in our decision making processes.

Accessibility

Partners will ensure that:

- The date, time and location of events are publicised and any relevant information is easily accessed by those who wish to attend.
- Events are held in accessible venues and locations.
- Material is available in a range of formats although in order to be cost effective some of this may only be produced on request.
- Information should be in Plain English. Where this is not possible we will provide a glossary of terms used.
- A suitable variety of engagement methods will be used.

It is important that all engagement activity undertaken by Partners, both in partnership and as individual organisations, is fully accessible to all those who wish to be involved. Accessibility will be considered during the pre-engagement stage and plans put in place to support specific requests should they arise. Barriers to engagement should be identified and removed where possible, for example providing

a crèche to support the involvement of those with childcare responsibilities or holding events at times and places that are accessible to those you wish to engage with. It should be accepted that Partners cannot anticipate all individual needs as standard and that members of the public will need to be proactive and inform the organisation if they have specific requirements e.g. suitable arrangements to support those with a hearing impairment who wish to attend a public meeting.

Allow time

Make sure that enough time is given to planning and undertaking engagement activity. If a decision or piece of work has to be delivered by a certain date work backwards to establish when the consultation should be started in order to give people time to respond and the results to be collated.

Communication

Most engagement activity is a two way process so the communication channels should be well supported, clear and easy to use for all concerned. How any engagement activity is publicised will have an effect on the number of people becoming involved.

If we want to speak with people face to face it is imperative to be in the right place at the right time.

No engagement activity should be a mystery. It should be clearly stated,

- How members of the public can get involved in a specific activity whether it be an information day or formal consultation.
- What, if anything, is expected of them.
- Any time constraints.
- Where/who to contact for further information (include website, e-mail, telephone number and postal address if possible). A contact name is not always necessary as long as the member of staff dealing with an enquiry has all the relevant information and can respond appropriately.
- What the parameters are; if the community is being consulted it should be clear what they are being consulted on, what can be changed and what is non negotiable.

Feedback should always be issued in a timely manner.

Co-ordination

Engagement activity across the Partnership should be co-ordinated with others, and where possible joined up, to maximise resources and minimise consultation fatigue.

Review

There are always lessons to be learnt from any engagement activity. Time should be spent to review, document and share these.

Equalities

Equality and diversity is an integral part of community planning and is recognised as a cross cutting theme across all areas of work.

An important part of the way we engage is to recognise diversity within the Scottish Borders and make a conscious effort to engage with hard to reach groups. A hard to reach group is a group of people who share common characteristics which may make it more difficult to engage with. Some of the characteristics could be language barriers, cultural barriers or even a small and dispersed population which make a group hard to engage with.

Hard to reach groups are often not hard to reach in physical terms, we know of them and how to make contact, but not necessarily how to engage. They are in fact, hard to engage groups rather than the commonly termed hard to reach.

We know these groups exist and there are individuals and organisations that work successfully with them. The challenge for Community Planning Partners is to build connections with hard to reach groups and increase engagement opportunities.

We should pay particular heed to the eight protected characteristics in all our work:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation

Data Protection

Many engagement activities result in the collection of personal information e.g. names and addresses. Organisations that handle personal information about individuals have legal obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998 to protect that information. There are eight data protection principles that all Partners, including those that are exempt from the Act, should follow:

1. Personal information must be fairly and lawfully processed.
2. Personal information must be processed for limited purposes.
3. Personal information must be adequate, relevant and not excessive.
4. Personal information must be accurate and up to date.
5. Personal information must not be kept for longer than is necessary.
6. Personal information must be processed in line with the data subjects' rights.
7. Personal information must be secure.
8. Personal information must not be transferred to other countries without adequate protection.

Personal information that is obtained by one Partner during an engagement activity cannot be shared with other Partners without the individual's permission. The individual must be made aware if it is intended to share information with Partners.

United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child

In 1989, governments worldwide promised all children the same rights by adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These rights are based on what a child needs to survive, grow, participate and fulfil their potential. They apply equally to every child, regardless of who they are, or where they are from.

Children and Young People may experience services differently from other members of the community, including their parents/carers. The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all children have the right to have a say in decisions that affect their lives (article 12). It also says that decisions should be made in the best interest of the child (article 3). Positive experiences of community engagement will encourage children and young people to be active citizens and effective contributors.

Community Empowerment Bill

The draft Community Empowerment Bill proposes to empower communities by giving them the lead in starting discussions with the public sector about things that matter to them. If approved, this will give community bodies the right to request to take part in a process to improve outcomes of public service delivery.

Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership is cognisant of the proposals and will seek to establish common processes, where possible, to meet the requirements of the Bill.

Glossary of Terms

Community	Everyone who lives and/or works in the Scottish Borders
Community Engagement	A communication process between organisations and the community
Community Planning	A process which helps public agencies to work together with the community to plan and deliver better services which make a real difference to people's lives.
Equality and Diversity	Term used to mean that individual as well as group differences will be recognised

The Scottish Borders Community Engagement Framework is supported by the following Partnership guidance documents:

Preparing to Undertake Community Engagement
A Guide to Consultation