

Harrow Council:

Towards a Community Engagement Strategy

Introduction

This is the first Community Engagement Strategy being developed by Harrow Council. In some respects, it has been produced in order to address the weaknesses in past and/or current engagement activity. Some of these appear on page 11. However it has also been developed to provide corporate standards, building on the considerable amount of good practice in areas of the council.

Building on this wealth of information, Harrow Council's Community Engagement Strategy outlines our approach to improving the way that local communities can contribute to decision-making and thereby act as true partners in achieving the following vision for Harrow:

'A borough that is safe, clean, healthy and prosperous, with equal life opportunities for all - a friendly and vibrant place to be.'¹

It is intended that Council officers, the local Council of Voluntary Service (HAVS) and other voluntary and community sector representatives on the Harrow Strategic Partnership Board will develop an initial draft of the Community Engagement Strategy. The Voluntary and Community Sector Forum and umbrella voluntary and community sector groups and members will then be consulted to ensure that the strategy reflects and gains the communities commitment to being part of local decision-making.

Aim of the Strategy

- To provide a comprehensive framework for the council's approach to engagement with the community, including identifying all stakeholders and appropriate opportunities.
- To support residents to have a genuine influence over decisions that affects their lives and enables them to communicate as equal partners.
- To ensure that minority groups and under represented groups are actively included and encouraged to take part in future decision making in Harrow.
- To develop standards for engagement across the council.
- To rationalise and ensure cost effectiveness across the council.
- To clarify the scope of engagement.

¹ *Community Strategy for Harrow 2004*

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Definition

Community engagement refers to activities designed to give the local community the opportunity to be involved in the decision making process.

Community engagement has varying levels of techniques from simply informing to empowering the public.

IAP2 Continuum of Community Engagement

Inform	To provide public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives or solutions
Consult	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives or decisions
Involve	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure the public and private concerns are consistently understood and considered.
Collaborate	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.
Empower	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public

Each technique will be chosen and utilised depending on which is the most appropriate to the level of engagement required for effective decision-making.

Why is this Strategy Being Developed?

Community engagement is a fundamental principle in empowering local communities to be part of the local decision making process. Residents are best placed to identify and suggest the most appropriate ways of delivering services. Engagement is also integral to the government's modernisation agenda as it relates directly to the council's community leadership role.

In addition, Government guidance on the development of Local Strategic Partnerships highlights that,

"LSPs should ensure that community and voluntary organisations and local people more widely are in a position to play a full and equal part in multi-agency partnerships"².

Community Engagement is not just an essential part of improving services. It can help unite residents and communities, build community pride and ownership, lead to the development and delivery of services that are responsive to local needs, implement Council's Equal Opportunities Policy and be challenging for everyone.

Value to Communities:

- Better information and understanding – opportunities are open for people to make informed input to a plan, policy or proposal. At the same time, decision makers and

² *Local Strategic Partnerships: Government Guidance* – DETR, March 2001, p.58

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service providers may find they have a more effective means to give an account of the reasons for their policies and proposed actions.

- Sense of involvement – the mutual sense of ‘ownership’ for all parties is enhanced through processes, which encourage sharing responsibility in planning, development, management or evaluation of proposed policies or developments.
- Better outcomes – outcomes can be achieved that more fully reflect the aspirations of the affected community.
- Helping people and communities to be stronger – People who are involved in local projects have a chance to build their personal skills – like finding out new ways of doing things, improving communication skills, building confidence etc

Value for Harrow Council

- Better ideas are brought to the project
- Conflict and delay are minimised
- Relationships are established in the local community that can benefit current and future projects
- Priorities are tested
- Value for money is optimised by enabling more efficient use of resources
- Reputation in the community is enhanced

Through the development of the Community Engagement Strategy, Harrow Council will endeavour to have the tools in place to enable residents of all neighbourhoods to get involved in whichever method is suitable to them. This will provide a strong political stance to support future community engagement in projects.

Local Democracy

As already indicated, there is a greater expectation from government that local community and stakeholders are given the opportunity to participate in influencing local services.

The role of elected members as community leaders and representatives of local communities is integral in successful communication and engagement with local people. Newly elected members will need to be given relevant information, training, support and development to allow them to fulfil this role.

Who are we Trying to Engage With?

Community could refer to anyone who has an interest in the Borough, whether they are individuals or groups representing residents, businesses, members, retailers and/or visitors.

A distinction is typically made in Harrow between individual residents and organised community and voluntary sector groups. Best practice guidance and government expectations identify both sets being important stakeholders in local decision-making.

It is also useful to draw a distinction between residents as citizens who are making judgements on their local services and residents as the direct consumers of particular services. Residents will also operate through communities of interest, often based on ethnicity, disability, age or area, but not exclusively.

Given the area-based approach to the delivery of services being delivered by the council, it will also be important to supplement the information mapped through the Harrow Vitality Profiles, with qualitative information from residents at a ward or area level, to identify localised need.

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Who	What might they be engaged in and how
Local residents as a generic group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular involvement in decisions about local neighbourhood through some form of neighbourhood forum as part of NHP Area Based Delivery Model ▪ Participation in representative democratic processes – voting, ward councillor’s surgeries etc ▪ Facilitating access to information, particularly under the Freedom of Information Act. ▪ Information and consultation on issues affecting the whole borough by using existing meetings and networks. ▪ Single issues through focus groups
Local residents who are in receipt of particular services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As above plus ▪ Feedback on local service provision e.g. street lighting, anti-social behaviour, uncollected bins ▪ Involvement in service planning and monitoring ▪ Objective feedback on performance
Local residents acting as part of a ‘community’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consultation about the specific needs of a community, for example of the development of the Refugee & Asylum Seekers Strategy, Asian Meals on Wheels Service.
Resident & tenant associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ See Housing
Community and voluntary sector groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interaction with the council as funding source ▪ Awareness of the value added they contribute to service delivery ▪ Access to community information ▪ Policy consultation through wider dissemination
Voluntary sector service providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Opportunities to provide specific services to the community ▪ On-going dialogue with public sector service providers to ensure strategic approach to service delivery ▪ Policy consultation through wider dissemination
Voluntary and Community Organisations eg Harrow Association of voluntary Service (HAVS) Harrow Council For Racial Equality Harrow Refugee Forum Mind in Harrow Harrow Association of Disabled People Age Concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular liaison with services to facilitate the above – particularly around: support for activities; access to funding; networking; consultative activity; information. ▪ Opportunities to tender to provide specific support to the community; ▪ Access to information and influence on issues concerning the wider area / city - and specifically about their own activity - through wider consultative processes and voluntary sector networks. ▪ Policy consultation through wider dissemination

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Faith groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Consultation about the specific needs of the faith community▪ Regular liaison with mainstream service providers to enable complementary approach to services provided, e.g. supplementary schools▪ Policy consultation through wider dissemination
User Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪
Others to be added during consultation on the Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪

Harrow Council Code of Engagement

Harrow Council will:

1. Accept as a principle that engagement will take place with all the community as a whole where decisions are being taken that are likely to lead to a change in policy or practice. If there is a reason why this cannot happen, for example, due to a statutory requirement for change, this should be communicated.
2. Make clear to participants what scope they have to influence the decision-making process.
3. Set realistic timescales for responses, engaging early so that participants can inform any policy changes.
4. Engage with potential participants in a way that is convenient and appropriate to them, dependent on available resources and efficiency.
5. Use existing networks and meetings wherever possible in order to reduce the burden to participants.
6. Specifically engage with those who are likely to be affected by any planned change in policy or practice.
7. Prepare consultation documents that are accurate, concise, clearly laid out and written in language that will be understood by the intended audience.
8. Give feedback to participants on the outcome of consultation, making clear how their input has been reflected in the final product.
9. Co-ordinate our consultations to reduce repetition. We will also share information as appropriate with other local agencies to attempt to streamline borough-wide consultation.
10. Where a significant change is being proposed to the council's decision-making body, an impact statement will be included in the officer's report. The impact statement will state who is being impacted and provide a summary of the consultation process and the outcome.

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Expectations of Stakeholders

This section will be informed by consultation on our proposed Corporate Strategy. However, there are some principles set out in the Harrow Code of Practice on Consultation, (see page 17) which is part of Harrow's Compact. These principles relate to voluntary and community sector agencies rather than individuals.

(standards will be developed for individuals as part of the consultation on the Strategy)

Stakeholders will:

- Take account of the specific needs, interests and contributions of those parts of the sector that represent women, minority groups and the socially excluded.
- Define and demonstrate how the voluntary sector represents their stated constituency, by stating who they are, what groups or causes in society they represent and how they involve those interest when forming their policies and positions, and in responding to the consultation itself.
- Wherever possible consult their constituencies directly, including services, volunteers, members and supporters; where this is not practicable or appropriate, to indicate that they are responding on the basis of their accumulated knowledge and experience working with the groups concerned.

Resources

Meaningful community engagement has resource implications in terms of time, materials and staffing needs. Once our strategy is developed, it will raise expectations as to the methods and extent to which we will engage. Therefore, the council will need to be clear about the resource implications if we are to follow best practice in community engagement.

Implementation of the Strategy

The Strategy has been drawn up against the background of, and with a view to continue the implementation of the local Compact (attached). The Compact sets out a broad agreement between the voluntary and community sector and the statutory sector and it intended to further develop a strong healthy relationship between the sectors. The Code on Consultation provides guidance that has been used to develop the council's Community Engagement Strategy.

Once the Strategy has been agreed, it will serve as a point of reference for stakeholders of every kind and it is therefore vital that it is disseminated to officers across the council who undertake community engagement.

When undertaking community engagement activity, the council's Policy and Partnerships Service will log engagement activity to minimise duplication across the Council and ensure the activity reflects the Corporate Community Engagement Strategy.

In the longer term, it is intended that activity across the borough will be mapped.

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The Community Cohesion Reference group of the Harrow Strategic Partnership will monitor the implementation of the Strategy to ensure that the principles and aims within it are being evidenced through the council's engagement with its stakeholders.

Measuring the Impact of the Strategy

Possible Performance Indicators

(From the Audit Commission's Quality of Life Indicators)

- Percentage of adults who feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area.
- The extent and influence of the voluntary and community sector in the locality.

('Local Indicators') – User attitude survey to determine:-

- Did participants find the process useful/enjoyable/empowering?
- Did the activity influence decision-making? Or if it didn't, was adequate feedback provided demonstrating how the decision was arrived at?
- Was there a positives impact on the partnership relationship between council and the community?
- What lessons have been learnt from this exercise?

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Supporting documents

Appendix 1- Who will be consulted on this Strategy

Given the nature of this Strategy, it is clearly integral to its development that stakeholders, partners and residents are given the opportunity to participate in its development. The following organisations will be invited for input:

- Harrow Councillors
- Harrow Strategic Partnership (HSP) Board and Executive
- HSP Community Cohesion Reference Group
- HSP Older People's Reference Group
- HSP Voluntary and Community Sector Forum
- Harrow Council For Racial Equality
- Harrow Refugee Forum
- Harrow Anti Racist Alliance
- Harrow Youth Council
- Harrow Association of Disabled People
- Local residents through advertising in local paper
- Children via the Children's Fund
- Harrow Agenda 21 Executive Forum
- Harrow Association of Voluntary Service
- Youth Effective Action Harrow (YEAH)

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Appendix 2

Weaknesses in Current Engagement Activity

Feedback from stakeholders on the council's past consultation activities indicates that:

- Possible duplication between council services and external agencies. Currently community engagement is carried out in an unstructured way across Harrow Council and the wider Harrow Strategic Partnership (HSP).
- There is no central place where activities are registered meaning that activities overlap or duplicate
- There is a lack of quality control over engagement activities
- The impact of engagement often goes unmeasured
- There is often little evidence that there are clear outcomes attached to the engagement activity, leading to the impression that it is being done as a 'tick box' exercise
- People appear to use traditional engagement mechanisms rather than considering which would be the most effective.
- There is no central resource or toolkit of suggested best practice.
- The resource implications of engagement or even consultation are often not identified.
- Engagement is carried out as a one- off activity. There is no on-going dialogue or structured feedback indicating the difference that has resulted from the input made.

Possible Obstacles and Solutions to Community Engagement based on experience of developing Community Strategy

Obstacle	Possible Solution
Resources	Identify resources for engagement.
Jargon and technical vocabulary	Produce jargon free documents, short summaries of reports and avoid speaking jargon at meetings
Notice of Meetings	A timetable of meetings is developed for the year.
Poor facilitation of meetings	Use be made of the council's pool of trained facilitators. Offer similar training to community representatives.
Consultation timescales too tight –no feedback	Set reasonable timescales. Make clear what will happen to input made into meetings.
Involvement of self- selected community reps with no accountability to their community or communities	Ensure that representatives are made aware of expectations of how they will feed back to their community and represent the opinion of their community.

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Appendix 3

Harrow Strategic Partnership Protocols- Checklist for Engaging With the Community

Name of person Initiating Activity:

Name of Organisation:

Contact Details:

1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 What is the purpose of your engagement activity?

- To find out peoples views
- To consult about decisions already made
- To enable people to participate in decision-making

1.2 What information is being sought?

1.3 How will the information gathered?

1.4 Can participants influence the decision making process?

1.5 Will a pilot exercise be necessary?

1.6 Have you considered the most appropriate form of engagement to get the information you require? For example;

Existing Meetings/Fora: Area Forums, Carers Forum, User Groups, Committee meetings

Bespoke Event: Conference, visioning exercise, focus group, public meeting

Media: Harrow People, Progress magazine, Press Release, Websites

Other: Suggestion Scheme, Survey

Need to indicate when you might use each type

2.0 RESOURCES

2.1 What resources will be needed?

- Publicity
- Printed information
- Translation & Interpretation
- Room hire
- Refreshments
- Staff time and training

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- Other

2.2 What is the total cost of the exercise and how will this be funded?

2.3 Are there any incentives for people to get involved in the consultation process e.g. childcare, refreshments, payment of expenses?

3.0 CONSULTATION TEAM

3.1 Who will be a member of the consultation team?

3.2 What are the roles and responsibilities of the consultation team?

3.3 Do the consultation team have any training needs?

4.0 WHO WILL BE CONSULTED

4.1 Board or Management Committee (state from which organisation)

4.2 Businesses (size, type etc)

4.3 Carers

4.4 Elected Members

4.5 Employees, specify of which agency

4.6 Faith groups

4.7 Health Agencies

4.8 Multi-Agency Forums (Domestic Violence; MAF on Racial Harassment; Supported Housing)

4.9 Harrow Strategic Partnership Groups:

- HSP Board
- HSP Executive Group
- HSP Management Group
- HSP Reference Groups

4.10 Potential service users or customers

4.11 Residents

4.12 Voluntary and community groups

4.13 Tenants and residents associations

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4.16 Others, please specify:

5.0 OTHER CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Is there any other consultation currently taking place about the same topic?
- 5.2 When was the last consultation on this topic or a related topic?
- 5.3 Is information from previous consultation available and credible?
- 5.4 What added value will be gained by additional consultation?

6.0 ACTION PLAN

- 6.1 Has a timetable for the consultation been agreed?
- 6.2 Check there is enough time for the consultation including planning, consultation, analysis, feedback and evaluation, and are you clear what everybody's responsibilities are?

7.0 INFORMATION

- 7.1 Has it been decided what information will be given to those who are being consulted
- 7.2 Is sufficient information being given to enable people to give as informed an opinion as possible
- 7.3 Has it been ensured that the information given is accessible to all
- 7.4 When will the information be given out to those being consulted

8.0 HOW WILL CONSULTATION AFFECT DECISION-MAKING

- 8.1 Which decisions can be affected by respondents views
- 8.2 Which decisions can not be affected by respondents views
- 8.3 How will results be fed into the decision making process

9.0 ANALYSIS

- 9.1 Who will be responsible for analysing the data
- 9.2 In what format will the results be presented

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10.0 HOW WILL RESULTS BE FED BACK TO RESPONDENTS

- 10.1 How will each group of stakeholders be informed
- 10.2 Will a written or verbal report be required to any committees
- 10.3 How will it be demonstrated that the consultation affected the final decision

11.0 EVALUATION

- 11.1 What response rate did you achieve
- 11.2 What criteria will be used to measure whether the consultation was successful
- 11.3 How will this evaluation be used to inform future consultation?

HARROW COMPACT

HARROW CODE OF PRACTICE ON CONSULTATION

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CONSULTATION CODE OF PRACTICE

This code, which is one of five good practice codes, underpins the Harrow Compact.

It is a written agreement, looking at a framework for future working relationships between local government, the wider statutory sector, the private sector and the voluntary and community sector.

Effective consultation has many benefits for the community which include:

- Helping to plan, prioritise and deliver better services.
- Developing policies formed from a wide range of experience, utilising knowledge experience and expertise.
- Increasing the credibility of the voluntary sector as a valuable source of informed opinion.

The aim of this code is to ensure that consultation is carried out in an effective manner with an underlying principle of no disempowerment for any organisation. However there does need to be a realization that consultation needs to be coordinated to avoid overload. It is suggested that to ensure organisations are consulted when they need to be, they are registered on an opt-in matrix through a partnership newsletter to be discussed at the voluntary and community sector forum. A quarterly partnership newsletter would also provide a regular opportunity to re-opt into subjects that an organisation may be interested in being consulted about.

There should also be underlying principles of openness and transparency.

ACTIONS

The statutory sector should

- Consult the voluntary and community sector on issues, which are likely to affect it, particularly where new roles and responsibilities in the sector are proposed.
- Appraise new policies and procedures and change existing policies and procedures, particularly at the developmental stage, identifying as far as possible any indications for the sector.

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- Consult early and, where possible, to involve the sector at a sufficiently early stage of policy development (don't forget to take into consideration those that need sensitivity or confidentiality).
- Prepare consultation documents that are concise, clearly laid out and written in simple language that will be understood by the intended audience.
- Ensure that the information they present is accurate and ensure that any research has been conducted in an objective and unbiased manner.
- Give their constituencies feedback on the outcome of consultation.
- Be sensitive on a case-by-case basis to any additional resource implications for the voluntary and community sector
- Accept as a principal that consultations should take place and if it does not, explain why it has not happened.
- Co-ordinate their consultations to reduce repetition and make consultation more focussed
- Share information gained in order to reduce repetitious consultation
- Include an impact statement on any issue that has material changes to the voluntary sector which is going to an ultimate decision making body, e.g. a Portfolio Holder briefing or Cabinet meeting. This statement should include a summary of the consultation process, its outcome and impact on a specific community or the voluntary sector in general.

The voluntary and community sector should

- Take account positively of the specific needs, interests and contributions of those parts of the sector which represent women, minority groups and the socially excluded.
- Define and demonstrate how the voluntary sector represents their stated constituency, by stating who they are, what groups or causes in society they represent and how they involve those interest when forming their policies and positions, and in responding to the consultation itself.
- Wherever possible consult their constituencies directly, including services, volunteers, members and supporters; where this is not practicable or appropriate, to indicate that they are responding on the basis of their accumulated knowledge and experience working with the groups concerned.

Areas to consider

A GOOD PRACTICE CHECKLIST:

Plan and consult early – build consultation into plans for policy development, based on specific proposals and services and more generally. Consultation should be open and

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meaningful; it should be made clear in the process which matters that are open to change and those matters on which a firm decision has already been taken.

CONSULTATION METHODS:

There are many ways of consulting and using more than one method increases the chances of response, both in terms of quality and quantity. Methods to be considered using:

Focus Groups

Residents Panels

Community Venues

Community Languages,

Plain and simple language should be used

Accessible format e.g. Braille, large print, consideration also needs to be given to the needs of people with learning disabilities and how their needs are met

Looking at the way people receiving the information can use it e.g. those with different disabilities

Considering the Internet although recognising not everyone will want to /have access to this

TIMESCALE

Accurate notice needs to be given to relevant specific bodies.

Sufficient time for consultation, it is suggested that **four weeks** as a minimum for standard consultations with **eight weeks** as a minimum for major complex consultations.

FEEDBACK:

There needs to be a mechanism for effective feedback, this could be through a database.

Feedback needs to be considered to groups and the community and information should be given about which part of the consultation information will be accepted, (with a date for implementation), what changed as a result of the consultation and what parts of the consultation have been rejected and why. It is also important to be clear that when groups are mentioned in conjunction with a partnership, they are agreeable to this.

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