

Community Engagement Strategy

Rossendale Borough Council's vision for engaged communities:

Working with, informing and empowering our communities, to create healthier, happier, stronger neighbourhoods.

What do we mean by Community Engagement?

At the centre of any Community Engagement Vision is the customer.

A strong vision for community engagement means creating a conversation with our community, to gain a unique understanding of not only their needs, but their assets. Also known as: 'Being on good talking terms and knowing what their strengths are!'

By working together with the community, we will share responsibility for creating:

- A clean, green Rossendale
- A healthy and successful Rossendale
- Responsive and value for money local services.

Rossendale Borough Council's Definition of Community Engagement.

'Community Engagement' means our continued relationship with the community; working with them, sharing information, responding to their needs and interacting with them. Through this we will create communities with a better quality of life, as communities have not only the power to influence our services, our policies, our decisions, what we deliver and how, but to work with us and deliver services themselves.

The 'community of Rossendale' is made up of lots of different groups, those with a locality in common, people with a shared interest, or people with a shared need.

We continually engage with the community, through the services we provide, by responding to enquiries, by consulting on the choices and decisions we make and by being a part of our community. Developing and maintaining a positive relationship with our communities is vital to the delivery of excellent services and ensuring effective community engagement.

Why we do it.

Apart from being the law, there are a number of very important reasons we have a Community Engagement Strategy. These include:

- Helping us create a stronger community. The more our communities are engaged, the more active they are and more resilient they become.
- Cost savings. As the economic climate continues to tighten around local authority spend, engaging with our communities will give us new ideas how to spend money most effectively; ensures we're spending it on the right services and look at creative ways to share service delivery with the community.
- Its good practice. We want to work with our community more effectively and productively, because it's the right thing to do.

Legal Requirements and Duties.

The legal duty to inform, consult or involve requires us to involve the communities in 'routine functions, in addition to one-off decisions,' at the appropriate level. The duty also outlines that a 'culture of engagement and empowerment' within a local authority should see 'consultation with and involvement of representatives of local persons across all authority functions.' Meaning that a culture of engagement should be embedded into everything we do.

The Localism Act 2001 includes giving communities the 'right to challenge' local authorities, in addition to new powers in relation to neighbourhood planning. It also creates a new law giving the community the opportunity to require the council to put local issues to referendum.

An effective community engagement strategy will help us ensure we meet these requirements, in addition to being good practice, helpful for the community, inform our decision making and as an aid to our work.

How do we see it working?

In practical terms this means **we must all consider and act upon our duty to engage** the community, we must prioritise working with the community in the decisions we make, the services we deliver and the policies we make. The more effective this engagement is, the more likely it is we will develop empowered communities and better services.

Is there a time when we wouldn't do it?

Hopefully no! However we work in an ever changing environment, where things continually change and sometimes we have to respond to emergencies. Although we might not engage when responding to an emergency, we should have already engaged about how we might respond, who best to work with, how to approach the issues and ways to deal with it. We should always strive to engage with our communities; and if we can't we need to have a clear, honest reason as to why not.

The Ladder of Engagement: Where we all are and where we're going...

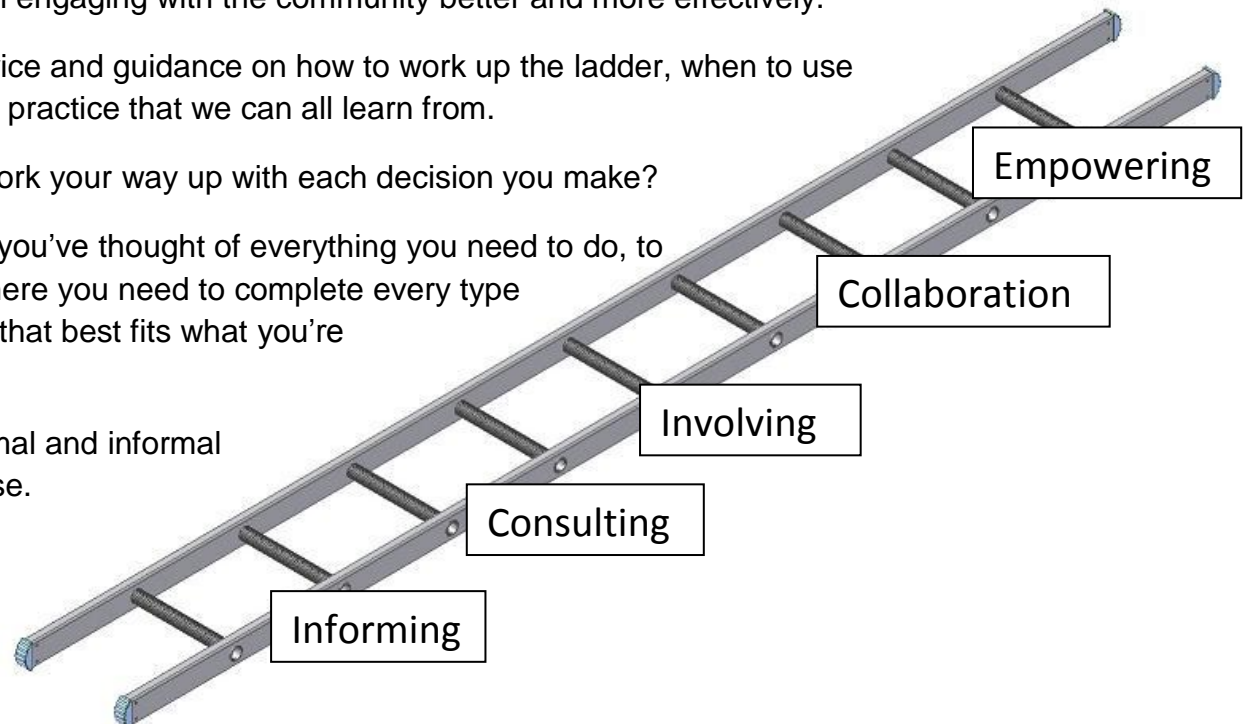
If we consider how we engage and at what level as a ladder, we can start at the bottom and work our way up. We can always aim to get a rung higher and challenge ourselves in engaging with the community better and more effectively.

The following toolkit can be utilised to give advice and guidance on how to work up the ladder, when to use different stages and provide examples of good practice that we can all learn from.

Starting at the bottom of the ladder, can you work your way up with each decision you make?

Use the check lists within the toolkit to ensure you've thought of everything you need to do, to move up the ladder. This is not an exercise where you need to complete every type of engagement, but you need to find the ways that best fits what you're doing.

Come up with new ideas, share them, use formal and informal methods, ensuring what you do is fit for purpose.



Informing:

We engage with the community in a number of ways. At a very basic level this might be answering phones, writing letters, people visiting us, us providing information on the webpage, on posters around the Borough or other forms of media.

Informing means we let people know something.

If our services impact on lots of people, we will choose a number of ways to inform people. We can inform through leaflets, the internet, press releases and in innovative ways such as on the side of refuse vehicles. Some of our services may only impact a small number of people, such as changing the venue of a meeting; therefore we will only inform these people and will do this in one way, such as via email, letter or telephone.

We can also take measures to ensure that those who can't access information in the ways mentioned above can still receive it. We do this by offering information in alternative formats, using social media sites, keeping our partner agencies up to date and ensuring STAN visits different neighbourhoods.

By taking this step we can ensure that our communities can access not just information they need, but also what they might be interested in.

Can you move up the ladder?

Once people are informed about the decision, they might want to know more.

If this is a decision that will excite people or capture their interest, you should already be thinking of moving up the ladder. If it's something that will affect a lot of people or impact greatly on budgets or services, you should move up the ladder.

Think about...	Also...
Have you thought about who this decision will affect?	Does it affect key protected equality groups?
Have you thought about how you're going to share this information?	Where would you put it on the website? Is there anywhere else you can put it?
Have you shared the information in a way people can understand it?	Have you used plain English? Have you explained any jargons or acronyms? Does it need bigger font?
How much will it cost you to inform people of this decision/share the information?	To use the citizen's panel costs, as does printing leaflets etc. Does the cost reflect the impact?
Are there different ways you can share the information?	Can it be demonstrated through pictures/images in addition to words? What innovative ways can you use to inform the community?
Will this decision impact on other services, on the budget, other resources?	Is this a cross departmental decision. What else is happening with the authority?
Do you need to complete a community impact assessment?	This can be accessed on the intranet. http://intranet/site/scripts/documents
How do you know if people have received the information?	What feedback can you get, is it a simple verbal 'yes' or have you noticed a change in behaviour as a result of informing.
Have you spoken to key elected members about this decision?	Is it a locality based decision, or does it affect a certain portfolio. How do elected members want you to share the decision/information?
Who do you tell internally and how far should it go?	Once this has been shared with your line manger, does it need to go into the team brief? To management team?

Consulting:

Every day we make decisions that affect the way we work, how we work and what we do: As a result this impacts on the communities we serve. This section is not to encourage you to consult on everything, but to review the impact of that decision and then decide on the amount/type/style of consultation needed.

Consultation is when we seek views on something specific and use these to inform what we do.

The amount of impact on the community differs immensely and is also confusing, as it doesn't directly relate to the number of people it impacts on.

For example a decision may only impact on a small number of people, but in a big way, where its message may resonate to other groups and services.

Can you move up the ladder?

Is this method thorough enough and robust? If people want to give their views and opinions, might they want to get involved in it?

Ensure you have looked at the table on informing before moving on, as it contains things to think about for every level.

You might also want to look at the consultation plan check list:

[S:\General Folder\Consultation Engagement & Surveys\Consultation Plan Checklist Template Working Draft Jan 2012.docx](#)

Think about...	Also...
Is this suitable for the citizen's panel?	This comes with a cost.
What key groups based in the valley can input into this decision?	It might not just be about community groups, but also stakeholders and other key partners.
Have you used clear, concise language?	Explain the jargon.
How can people find out about the results of the consultation?	Where will you display the results and how will people know where to find them? Keep it timely.
Is it proactive?	Are you going out to consult, or are you expecting people to come to me?
Have you given it enough time?	People need time to gather their responses and provide the feedback?
Is it accessible?	Can the consultation be accessed in a different way, if it's an online feedback form, can people be consulted on in a new way?
Ensure you are not just 'ticking boxes.'	Building up an open honest relationship with our community is important. Therefore it's important to ensure that the consultation is being done for a reason; that we genuinely care about the results. They will want feedback afterwards.

Involving:

We need to ensure we understand our communities; we do this through things such as the older peoples' forums, the disability forum, attending residents meetings, Police and Community Together (PACTS), neighbourhood forums etc...

Involving residents means them being a part of the decision making process.

In some ways Involving is like Collaborating. In Involving, the council is responsible for the end action.

Involving allows us to utilise other people's skills and knowledge in order to create a better end product. By involving others it allows you to see things you might not have noticed before and might show you solutions you didn't previously see. The best thing about involving is the number of times you think 'I didn't think of that!' or 'what a brilliant idea!'

Can you move up the ladder?

It's great to get the community involved in the decision, but can they take some of responsibility for it. Instead of them just sharing their ideas, can they help implement them?

Think about...	Also...
Who is 'sat around the table' to discuss this.	Who's missing? It's important to have enough to assess the issue, but not too many that it gets lost.
What is the political nature of the others sat around the table?	Most organisations will have their own agendas around that table. Be it an interest in their own community or work, this need to be considered, balanced and managed.
How do you draw the best out of people?	Some people sat around the table may be intimidated by working so closely with the authority and may struggle to 'shout out' about their views and ideas, remember to structure a safe environment, where everyone can input
How do you keep it on track?	Getting new people around a table can produce a lot of energy, and it's important to capture this, but ensure you're sticking to the issue, but keeping note of those side issues to raise another time
Can people share without speaking at a meeting?	Can people provide written feedback or feedback through social media? What support can you give to people to include them?

Collaborating:

Collaboration requires an understanding that everyone has the abilities and skills to solve problems, make decisions and affect positive change.

Collaborating means working together with communities to identify problems, discuss them and create positive change.

Collaborating is a team effort where the Council is part of the team looking at the decision to be made; we are not the leads, nor are we at the sidelines looking in.

It's worth considering that this process can take a long time to work, but by building up strong relationships with the community prior to this, you will already be on your way to this level.

Can you move up the ladder?

It's great that you can work in collaboration with the community to solve problems, but can they take more of a lead?

Think about...	Also...
Who is responsible for what?	Is the responsibility being shared fairly?
If there is a cost associated, who will pay and what how will it be coordinated?	Collaborating means sharing everything, including cost. But remember, cost may not just be financial. Can people help out with resources and skills?
How formal should this be?	You might not want to have a written contract, but its important to be clear what everyone's responsibility is and what they should be doing to fairly contribute.

Empowering:

Successful engagement ultimately means you're out of a job! If you've given the community the right tools and resources they can manage and solve issues on their own.

Empowering means the community leading on the decision and them taking responsibility into their own hands.

Realistically the community can't do everything, and some legal requirements revolve around us still taking a lead, but for empowering to be effective you need to know that the community can run things effectively and responsibly.

You're at the Top!

There's nowhere to go; celebrate by sharing your good practice. Well done!

Think about...	Also...
Who did you tell internally and how far should it go?	Once this has been shared with your line manger, does it need to go into the team brief? To management team?
What is the long term effect on the Council?	Are there any long term budget implications, good or bad? Are there any risks?
How will the relationship be managed?	Regular meetings? Updates?

DRAFT

Case Studies.

Ask yourself how you can share this with...

- Other officers
- Notifying elected members
- Feeding back to the community

Below are a number of examples that can be used to draw on from experience.

Informing

Rural conference: A conference for residents who live in rural areas is being organised by a community group. The council is keen to support this event and work with residents on any issues they identify through the conference. Due to funding, the event is open to any residents in 3 wards in the borough and is free to attend.

Residents needed informing of the event, to give them the opportunity to attend and give their input. The event was advertised through press releases, posters being distributed and the website.

It was considered that many of those targeted to apply may live on working farms and therefore may struggle to attend an event. To ensure that these residents knew about the event and could still have an opportunity to be involved, an officer went on the rural bin route to talk to the rural farm owners. This way they know about what was happening, they were informed of other ways they could get involved and they were included directly in the informing process.

However, this did come with a cost, an officer was needed to be on the rural route, and time was restricted at each property, as normal waste collection was still needed.

In response many properties were pleased that the council was keen to visit rural properties directly and saw it as an opportunity to ask about additional council services. However, some key groups were missed, faith groups who have specific rural officers were not informed about the event, and rural properties in other areas were keen to be involved.

Untidy Back Alleys: In a number of streets in the borough, we receive complaints about people leaving bins out, dogs being allowed to foul and people leaving them messy. In this instance we will first write to every resident asking them to be respectful of the street and explain to them the council is aware of its state. This simple action often causes the behaviour to change for the better. We have had no need to move onto further stages of engaging because the simple action of informing created the desired result.

Consulting

Car Parking: A space in Rawtenstall that was used by cars to park all day, but had no time restrictions or lines laid out for cars. It was discussed whether to make it officially into a short stay car park. The shops surrounding the car parks were consulted with and it appeared on the 'Have your say' section on the website, in addition to this key stakeholders were also consulted with, including The Chamber of Commerce and Lancashire County Council.

All feedback was considered before the option was decided upon. People would be able to see what the feedback was from the consultation by visiting the space in question.

Involving

Limey Valley Residents Association. A forward plan was created for the Limey Valley area of Rossendale (Crawshawbooth and the surrounding area towards the Burnley boundary). Residents were unhappy about the plans and wanted to be able to provide feedback and work productively with the council in the development of their local area. Supported by a team within the council the residents formed a community group. This group then worked closely on the forward plan, being able to understand the law around the document, its logistics, but also provide in-depth local knowledge and give honest open opinions. Although staff time was used for this project, this project was of minimum cost to the authority. The group are now fully constituted and arranging a variety of activity for the local area.

Historia – the council wanted to bid for some money linked to a history project. A local community group was asked to provide their input, knowledge and ideas into the project. This enabled the project to be a more rounded, stronger application. The funding was awarded and the community group worked with the council to help deliver it. This started as an 'involving' stage, but developed into 'collaboration' as both groups worked towards completing the project.

Collaborating

The Town Team. Rawtenstall Chamber of Commerce and Rossendale Revival wanted to work with the council to create a town team. A funding pot became available and the council and the above mentioned groups wanted to apply for the funds together.

Each group was able to bring their own expertise to the project and also help identify problems relating to their organisation. Rossendale Revival, who had experience of running community events, brought this knowledge, along with working with young people. The Chamber brought their expertise of running local business and links to large companies based in the area, who didn't have a shop and the council provided their expertise in writing bids and facilitating meetings.

The team created a plan for the development of Rawtenstall in relation to tourism, shopping and the markets and the group have worked as a joint team in beginning its delivery.

Bacup CHAT It was identified that worklessness was a severe issue in some wards within the borough. The council had some funding around supporting getting people into work and training. This needed to be done by using community volunteers to encourage others to access local support services. The authority was able to complete the monitoring of the project, whilst the volunteers could work on the ground, linking in closely with community members, and the volunteer organisation that helped deliver the project were able to deliver training and support.

Empowering

The Hub: Bacup Leisure Hall was facing closure as a result of a leisure review. A number of options were considered, including closing it, selling it to a private company and passing it over to a community association. After a long exhaustive project, the council managed to work with a private company who invested in the building and also worked with a newly formed community group who would work in collaboration with everyone.

The ski slope: the local authority could no longer afford to give further funding to the ski slope.