

middlesbrough

partnership

Community Engagement Framework

June 2005

Overview

What is the point of cities built without the people's wisdom

Brecht

Introduction

Community participation and engagement is essential to secure sustainable improvement in public services and to re-engage citizens in the public decision making processes that effect their lives.

Community engagement gives citizens an opportunity to inform Middlesbrough partners about their own vision for their communities and neighbourhoods and what they want and need in terms of service provision. It also enables them to work with partners to improve their communities, their quality of life and to realise their vision.

Community engagement also provides Middlesbrough partners with an opportunity to inform citizens about their services and how they use engagement activities to inform decision-making.

Background

The Middlesbrough Partnership is committed to engaging with citizens and other key stakeholders. The original *Framework for Engaging with Communities* was developed by the Partnership in 2001 and has formed the basis for community engagement by partners since that time.

The *Community Engagement Framework* and separate *Consultation Toolkit* build on the strong foundations of the original *Framework*, updated for contemporary times to reflect current best practice and government direction.

The *Community Engagement Framework* and *Consultation Toolkit* were developed by a small team with community engagement expertise drawn from partnership organisations.

Middlesbrough Partnership

The Middlesbrough Partnership (the Local Strategic Partnership for Middlesbrough) brings together public, private, community and voluntary representatives with the aim of co-ordinating services to improve the quality of life of people living and working in Middlesbrough.

The Middlesbrough Community Strategy is a shared commitment and program of action from its partners and communities to help achieve the vision for Middlesbrough in 2025:

Middlesbrough will be a thriving, vibrant community where people and businesses succeed.

The Strategy is based around six key themes:

- Supporting children and learning
- Promoting healthier communities for all and effective social care for adults
- Creating safer and stronger communities
- Transforming our local environment
- Meeting local transport needs more efficiently
- Promoting the economic vitality of Middlesbrough.

The Community Engagement Framework and Consultation Toolkit will assist the partnership to successfully deliver its action programs and help to achieve the vision for Middlesbrough.

Government Policy

The Government sees public consultation and engagement as central to the delivery of its modernisation and improvement program and at the heart of the work of local authorities. The 1999 and 2000 Local Government Acts, in particular provide the statutory requirements that underpin community engagement as a key tool for service improvement and democratic renewal.

The following thinking provides the basis for the increased role and profile of public consultation:

- Service improvement is to be driven by a real understanding of public needs
- Understanding public needs ensures that service delivery is undertaken more efficiently and effectively
- Information from public consultation will be used to benchmark and monitor service delivery – helping to identify problems and drive improvement
- Citizen / user involvement is important in engaging people in local decision making and strengthening council roles and local democracy.

Purpose and Objectives

Purpose

The purpose of the *Community Engagement Framework and Consultation Toolkit* is to ensure that citizens, visitors and other key stakeholders in Middlesbrough have a voice to influence the development of policies and strategies that will affect their lives and to inform the way in which services are planned and delivered.

The *Community Engagement Framework and Consultation Toolkit* provide an overarching framework for community engagement in Middlesbrough together with a best practice guide. The documents are for use by people from Middlesbrough Partnership organisations to help them to engage with their communities consistent with Partnership objectives and professional and ethical research standards.

Objectives

The objectives of the *Community Engagement Framework and Consultation Toolkit* are:

- To ensure that all Partners have a clear understanding of and commitment to, engaging with communities.
- To embed the principles of community engagement in the work of the Partnership.
- To establish a co-ordinated and consistent approach to community engagement.
- To ensure that community engagement is carried out to a consistently high professional and ethical standard.
- To ensure that community engagement is inclusive by giving every citizen the opportunity to express their views and that those views will be listened to and respected.
- To ensure that the outcomes of community engagement are used to plan and deliver services, strategies and policies that reflect the needs of Middlesbrough citizens.
- To ensure that the community engagement process is transparent and accessible to all, including hard-to-reach groups.

Why Engage with Communities?

Community engagement complements representative democracy within Middlesbrough and in particular helps organisations to understand the wants and needs of citizens and to plan and deliver their services accordingly.

By building citizen involvement into the heart of service delivery, partner organisations and citizens can work collaboratively and enjoy a range of benefits including:

- **Empowering people to define the vision for their own community**
People who belong to, live in or work in particular communities should have the right to influence the future of their community. If people can be involved in defining the vision for their community, it will create a greater sense of community spirit, belonging and pride.
- **Responsive services tailored to the needs of the community**
People who live and work in Middlesbrough are best placed to tell us what issues affect them and what is needed to improve their quality of life. By defining issues and debating problems and solutions with the public, agencies can target resources where they are needed and provide solutions that are tailored and responsive to the needs of the local community.
- **Better informed citizens**
Sharing information helps the public to gain a far better understanding of the Partnership's policies or priorities. It also helps to manage expectations, explain what can and cannot be done and explain any constraints that may exist.
- **Better performance measurement**
Community engagement, particularly consultation through surveys is an effective way of establishing base-line data for performance indicators that organisations can use to measure service effectiveness and user-satisfaction.
- **Encouraging democratic involvement**
One likely effect of enhancing community engagement is the reinvigoration of the democratic process and a reversal of the declining trends in voter turnout for elections. It is important to note that the engagement itself is an exercise in participatory democracy that many people will find much more satisfactory than simply exercising their right to vote.
- **Building responsible citizenship**
If communities are able to play a significant role in improving their neighbourhood or in planning and developing a project or initiative, they are more likely to develop a greater sense of responsibility or ownership. This will strengthen the role of the community in the management of their neighbourhoods.

- Improving relationships between partner agencies and the public**
 Community engagement makes organisations more open and accessible to the public and by making services more responsive to the needs of the public, helps to build upon and improve relationships.
- Building capacity**
 Community engagement can help to build the capacity of participants by developing their knowledge and skills. They will learn about their community, its issues and organisational structures and processes. Involvement in the consultation process may also build practical skills such as interviewing and conducting surveys.

Understanding Community Engagement

The term community engagement is used to embrace a whole spectrum of activities that support the two-way communication process between the Partnership and citizens, visitors and other key stakeholders in Middlesbrough.

The Five Levels of Community Engagement

| <i>Increasing Level of Public Empowerment</i> → | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| INFORM | CONSULT | INVOLVE | COLLABORATE | EMPOWER |
| To provide information to assist the public to understand issues | To obtain public feedback to inform decision-making. | To work directly with the public to ensure issues and concerns are addressed | To partner with the public in decision-making | To place final decision-making in the hands of the public. |
| <u>Impact on public</u> We will keep you informed | <u>Impact on public</u> We will keep you informed, listen to your concerns and provide feedback on how your input influenced decision-making | <u>Impact on public</u> We will work with you to ensure your concerns are directly reflected in options and provide feedback on how your input influenced decision-making | <u>Impact on public</u> We will look to you for advice and innovation in finding solutions and incorporate your advice to the maximum extent | <u>Impact on public</u> We will implement what you decide |
| Example Brochures and Newsletters | Example Surveys and Focus Groups | Example User Panels | Example Community Needs Analysis | Example Referenda |

Consultation, involvement and collaboration are all terms that are regularly used, often interchangeably, to describe community engagement activities. However, each term refers to intrinsically different forms of engagement, the use of which is dependent on the overall objective of your exercise.

It is important that the appropriate terminology is used when undertaking any form of engagement activity in order to avoid confusion and to ensure clarity of purpose.

What are Communities?

It is important to recognise that communities can be defined in different ways. Simple and broadly accepted definitions are:

- **Communities of place** – the community is defined by an area with physical boundaries eg a housing estate or neighbourhood.
- **Community of interest** (also referred to as an interest group) – the community is defined by a shared interest, experience or demographic characteristic – for example young people, people with disabilities, working population, ethnic minorities.

People can belong to more than one community and communities are therefore by their very nature heterogeneous. It is also worth noting that members of defined communities may not necessarily regard themselves as such and consideration must be given to this when approaching different communities.

Who are our Stakeholders?

The term stakeholders is used regularly throughout this document. Stakeholders is a generic term for all people who have an interest in the well being of Middlesbrough. This includes partners, residents, visitors, businesses, government, public service and voluntary organisations.

What are *Hard to Reach* Groups?

It is essential that community engagement activities reflect the diversity of Middlesbrough's population. The term *hard to reach* is widely used to describe those groups or communities who experience social exclusion and disempowerment. They are generally perceived by agencies as being by their nature difficult to access.

However, it is important to note that many of these communities are not actually that hard to reach and do not consider themselves as such. It is simply that organisations have not been sensitive to the needs of these groups and given enough consideration as to how to engage with these groups and overcome any barriers to access these groups may face.

Principles of Community Engagement

The following overarching principles will help to ensure that community engagement in Middlesbrough is consistent and in accordance with appropriate ethical and professional standards.

The *Consultation Toolkit* contains detailed information about how to plan and manage your community engagement activity and how to use the results.

Part A: Planning your Community Engagement

1. Identify the need

Engagement should only be carried out where there is an identified need such as a statutory requirement or an identified knowledge gap in the Partnership.

2. Consider other options

Duplication of effort should be avoided by reviewing other options for obtaining data and by joining up activities within the Partnership.

3. Justify your target community

Agencies must be able to clearly justify why they have chosen a particular target community or consultation sample.

4. Define your purpose and objectives

The purpose and objectives of the engagement should be clearly defined and made clear at the beginning of the activity to participants.

5. Ensure your method is *fit for purpose*

This means that the engagement tool that you select must be appropriate for your overall objective and for the community with whom you are engaging.

Part B: Engaging with the Community

1. Be open and honest

Always be open and honest about what can and cannot be achieved and what your constraints or boundaries are.

2. Be inclusive and avoid discrimination

The processes and outcomes of community engagement should aim to be inclusive and must not discriminate against anyone.

3. Involve participants early

Involve people at the earliest stages of projects rather than simply consulting them about pre-determined options, or decisions that have been made.

4. Consider *hard to reach* groups

Agencies should proactively seek the views of hard-to-reach groups using appropriate means of communication and engagement.

5. Overcome barriers to participation

Sufficient time and information in appropriate media / formats should be provided to participants in order to overcome possible barriers to participation including literacy, numeracy, sensory impairment and language.

6. Protect the privacy of participants

It is essential that the personal information of participants in any community engagement activity is safeguarded and that the requirements of the *Data Protection Act 1998* are fully met.

Part C: Evaluation and Feedback

1. Provide regular feedback

Participants should receive regular feedback on how the views they express will be fed into decision-making processes and what will happen after the engagement exercise is completed.

2. Provide access to information

Participants should be given an opportunity to see any written information recorded as a result of the engagement activity and agree whether it is a true record of their views.

3. Evaluate and monitor success

Evaluation and monitoring procedures should be built in to measure how the outcomes of engagement have impacted on policy and strategy development and whether they have been effective and met community expectations.

4. Provide the opportunity for comments and complaints

All participants should be given the opportunity to comment or to make any complaints on the engagement process.

5. Share the results

The results of the community engagement process should be made available to participants, partner organisations and wherever possible the general public and other key stakeholders in Middlesbrough.