



Community Participation and Engagement Strategy

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1. Introduction

Community participation and engagement is all about our Council and our communities working together with Community Planning partners to improve and sustain services that matter most locally. In order for Council services to be delivered effectively, particularly in times of reducing resources, it is vital that these services are shaped and prioritised by the people who live in Dumfries and Galloway.

The Communities Committee agreed on 1 December 2016 agreed the policy intent of the Strategy:

- To empower individuals and communities by giving them a stronger voice and greater influence over Council decisions that affect them
- making our engagement arrangements more efficient across partners thereby getting best value for the resources we are investing in this area of work
- building and maintaining relationships with communities, ensuring that local people and communities are at the heart of our decision making.
- become better at engaging with communities

Already our Council works together with communities across Dumfries and Galloway to ensure that they have influence over local decision making structures:

- we provide public services that are more responsive to the needs of the community they serve
- we encourage local people to become involved in local democratic decision making processes
- we can target resources to sustain services that matter most to communities
- we can enable communities to influence their future and encouraging a sense of community spirit, belonging and local resilience.
- we can help build the capacity of individuals and communities. If engaged with effectively their knowledge base and skills are likely to develop
- we can save money, our communities can give us new ideas how to spend money most effectively and look at creative ways to share service delivery
- its good practice. We want to work with communities more effectively and productively, because it's the right thing to do.

We benefit significantly from the positive relationships that already exist. This Strategy seeks to improve the quality of our activities, learn from past experience and better co-ordinate this area of our work with Community Planning partners.

2. Definitions

What do we mean by participation and engagement?

Communities can be defined in different ways. A simple and broadly accepted definition is as follows:-

- Communities of place – the ‘community’ is defined by an area with physical boundaries, e.g. neighbourhood, village, town, ward, etc.
- Communities of interest – the ‘community’ is defined by a shared interest, experience or demographic characteristic – i.e. young people, people with disabilities =, working population, ethnic minorities or gay/lesbian/bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT).

Note: - People can belong to more than one community. 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 of interest.

Effective community engagement involves an ongoing dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders within our communities to inform the way in which we plan and deliver services. Engagement with communities is defined in the National Standards for Community Engagement (NSCE) as:- *‘A purposeful process which develops a working relationship between communities, community organisations and public bodies to help them to identify and act on community needs and ambitions. It involves a respectful dialogue between everyone involved, aimed at improving understanding between them and taking joint action to achieve positive change.’*

Similarly, participation involves the activities, at various levels, by which individuals and communities share in the responsibility for shaping decisions and improving services.

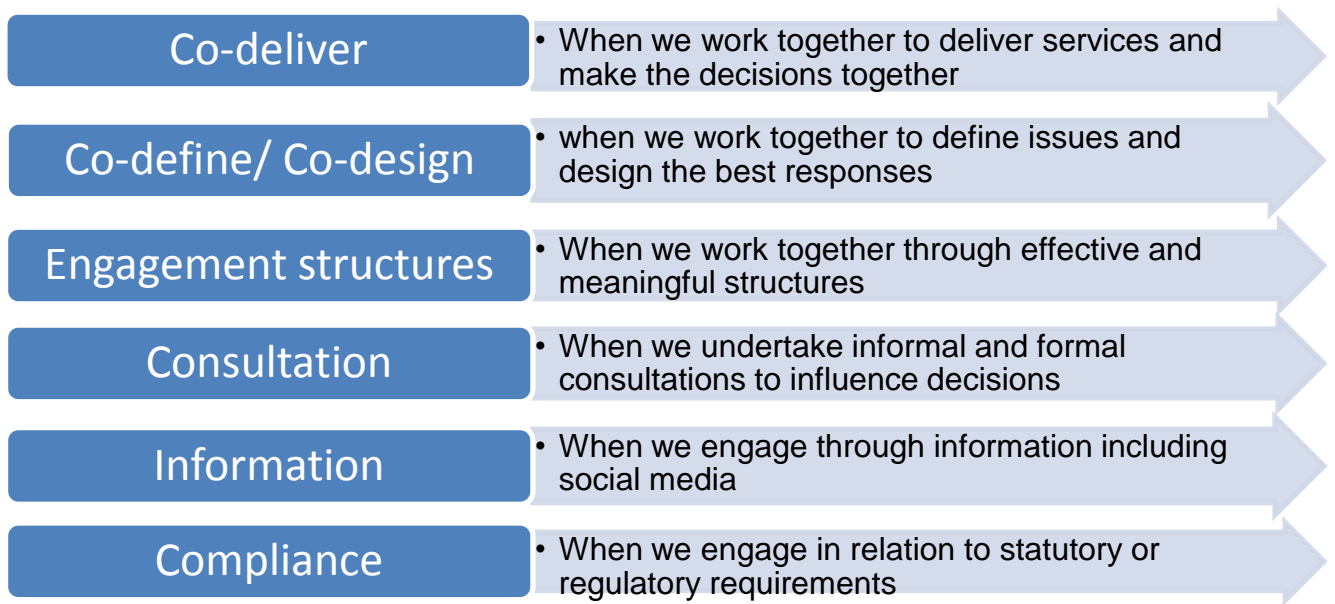
‘Seldom heard’ is a term used throughout the Strategy to describe those communities who may not typically be involved in engagement processes. They are often perceived as being hard to reach and as a result could be less likely to have their voices heard and have influence. However it is important to note that many of these communities are not hard to reach at all, and do not consider themselves as such. It is perhaps the case that the approaches and methods we have used in the past have not always been successful in securing their views.

Types of Participation and Engagement

The term ‘Participation and Engagement’ is used throughout this Strategy to encompass a range of activities in the various situations in which we interact with individuals, stakeholders and communities

One of the key issues to emerge from the development of this Strategy is the importance of consistent terminology and language. The definitions given in Figure 1 are used throughout this Strategy are taken from the Consultation Institute training programme which six local partners are already involved in. A result of this joint training is that a common understanding is being established across Community Planning partners.

Figure 1



3. Context

Our approach is set within a local, national and international context where there is increasing commitment, legislation, and emphasis on community participation and engagement/ As a result it is essential that a culture of engagement with our communities be embedded into our business planning process.

3.1 International and National

There is a significant body of legislation that demands and promotes engagement with communities of place, of interest, and individuals who live in our region:

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (CE(S)A) 2015 and associated Guidance and Regulation - This legislation has a specific focus on promoting effective engagement and participation to help communities achieve greater control and influence in the decisions and circumstances that affect their lives, particularly to tackle socio economic disadvantage.

Equalities Act 2010 - The Duties of the Equality Act include: “taking reasonable steps to involve persons in the development of the set of equality outcomes who share a relevant protected characteristic...”

Health and Social Care - The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Integration Scheme) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 set out the requirement for the development of a Participation and Engagement Strategy by the Integration Joint Boards by 1 April 2016.

Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy - This Commission, chaired by the COSLA President, outlined in its final report in 2014 why local democracy matters and set out key principles for a stronger democracy in Scotland. It included the ‘principle of participation - all communities must be able to participate in the decision-making that affects their lives and their communities’

Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services - This Commission, chaired by Campbell Christie, highlighted that, if they are to be effective, public services must empower individuals and communities by involving them in both the design and delivery of services. Such an approach requires understanding the needs of communities and working together. It advocated a fundamental overhaul of the relationships between institutions responsible for delivering public services and the needs of individuals and communities.

Review of the National Standards of Community Engagement – The Scottish Community Development Centre originally launched the Standards in 2005. The National Standards were reviewed last year and some minor changes were made including a reduction from 10 to 7 Standards (Inclusion; Support; Planning; Working Together; Methods, Communication and Impact) and improved support materials.

3.2 Regional

Community Planning Participation and Engagement Working Group - A new Group established in December 2016 which brings together eight local partners (including our Council) with a remit to improve the co-ordination of engagement activity for the benefit of local people and also to make best use of resources.

Dumfries and Galloway Local Outcomes Improvement Plan and Locality Plans - New Plans require to be produced by the Community Planning Partnership as set out in the CE(S) A 2015, a particular focus is on tackling socio-economic disadvantage and the engagement of communities in their development, monitoring and reporting. The Plans have to be in place by 1 October 2017

Dumfries and Galloway Participation and Engagement Network - Founded on the NHS Public Partnership Forum and designed as a form of citizen's panel, it was refreshed in December 2016 and offers one route to engage with local people who have expressed an interest in being consulted by public sector organisations.

3.3 Our Council

Priorities and Commitments - Priority Four: 'to be an inclusive Council' and a specific Commitment 'ensure that local people and communities are at the heart of our decision-making'

Advocacy and Lobbying - Our Council's improved approach to advocacy and Lobbying approach has seen the development of a specific Strategy which sets out our vision for advocating and lobbying for our region, sharing our strengths, needs and aspirations; providing guidance and clarity on all our roles and there is now mandatory training to implement it.

Channel shift - The Policy and Resources Committee agreed our Council's Digital and ICT Strategy in October 2016 which includes citizen centred service delivery, the development of a range of channels allowing citizens to choose how they wish to engage with our Council and more equal opportunity. Improved digital web based services will also extend flexibility.

Code of Good Practice for the Exchange of Information with Community Councils - Scheduled for review and updating in 2017, this Code sets out some basic timescales and principles about engagement between our Council and Community Councils.

Customer focus - The Communities and Customer Services Committee agreed a Customer Strategy and Charter in October 2015 which includes reference to responsiveness and a Communication and Engagement Plan. There is ongoing Customer feedback

Equality Outcomes - Our Council's Equality Outcomes is 'ensure that our ageing population is involved, active and engaged to lead healthy lives in their own community'; young people are more actively engaged in local decision making.

Impact Assessment - Our Council's Guidance and toolkit for Impact Assessment recommends the involvement of relevant stakeholders in the process.

Specific engagement activity - there are protocols being developed as part of our work around School Clusters and there are annual Parental Satisfaction Surveys. Dumfries Learning Town has a Stakeholder Engagement Plan to ensure ongoing communication with learners, parents, staff and communities; and we have dedicated forums for engagement around regeneration in certain areas across our region.

Participatory Budgeting - An allocation from the Change Fund is providing dedicated resource to develop a mainstreaming approach so that there is integration of this initiative with community asset transfer, volunteering and Participation Requests.

Dumfries and Galloway Reshape Programme - The Programme agreed by Full Council in December 2014 provided for a Service Review on Enabling Community Empowerment Review; The Delivery Plan is currently being implemented. In addition the Reshape Programme established eight Centres of Excellence of which one is Community Participation and Engagement; the Reshape has seen the creation of a Communities Directorate and a Community Planning and Engagement Unit which has a dedicated post for Community Engagement and 12 Ward officers, who's Job Description includes community engagement and are key agents of change. This represents a significant investment and commitment to this new way of working.

Strategic Commissioning - The Communities Committee in August 2016 agreed that Strategic Commissions be developed for representation and engagement for third sector and protected characteristics. These are being developed on a co-production basis and will be in place by 30 June 2017.

4. Our Centre of Excellence for Community Participation and Engagement

The Council's Reshape Programme agreed in December 2014 established a Centre of Excellence for Community Participation and Engagement with a commitment to improving the quality of our approach and delivery. The principles in Figure 2 below are being applied across all nine Centres of Excellence and have significantly influenced the development of the Action Plan.

Figure 2

- Bring together expertise and skills (possibly virtually)
- Promote collaboration
- Use best practice tools and techniques
- Drive excellent customer results
- Provide leadership and expertise in community engagement and participation
- Promote and share information and knowledge to deliver continuous improvement
- Central point for information and data
- Be measured and accountable including external accreditation
- Accredite and quality assure participation and engagement
- Build and enhance the skills and expertise of colleagues across CP partners
- Benchmarking & national engagement

5. Development of the Strategy

Our Strategy has been built on feedback from communities, individuals and community councils about previous and current Council engagement activity; benchmarking and experience from other councils; national and best practice advice; consultation with Elected Members, local partners and hard to reach groups; and Impact Assessment.

5.1 Feedback from communities, individuals and community councils:

- Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) Research with community groups, community councils, representative groups of minority communities; staff focus groups; and individual interviews – October 2015
- Evidence Sessions as part of the Scrutiny & Performance Committee Review of Public Involvement including with local community groups and individuals, Community Councils and – throughout 2016
- Crichton Institute Research into Poverty and Deprivation including discussions with people with lived experience of poverty - May 2015
- Dumfries and Galloway Community Survey online survey and group discussions- November 2015

5.2 Benchmarking and experience of other councils:

- Analysis of Involvement/Participation Strategies and discussions with six other councils - East Ayrshire; North Ayrshire; Perth and Kinross; Renfrewshire; Scottish Borders; and South Lanarkshire.

5.3 National and best practice advice:

- Membership of the Consultation Institute; discussion with the Scottish Community Development Centre; and analysis of the Review of the National Standards of Community Engagement

5.4 Consultation with Elected Members:

- Briefing and discussion session – February 2017

5.5 Consultation with local partners:

- Community Planning Participation and Engagement Working Group; Community Learning and Development Partners' Strategy Policy Group; and Trades Unions – discussions – February 2017

5.6 Consultation with the Community Planning Equality and Diversity Group:

- Representative organisations for Protected Characteristics particularly age, disability, gender, race, sexuality and religion – facilitated discussion – February 2017

5.7 Stakeholder Impact Assessment:

- 4 medium and 5 low positive Impacts, 4 No Impacts, 0 negative Impacts - February 2017

5.8 Key messages from the feedback

- Allow enough time for a consultation to take place
- Tell people more about the topics in advance, especially if they are complicated
- Stop using jargon and Council speak; use plain language that people can understand
- Improve the Councils website and make it easier to use, especially on tablets and mobile phones – (574 respondents use the internet regularly mainly using their own computer or tablet, 257 use their phone)
- Only consult where there is more than one option to choose from and when the views obtained can really make a difference
- Consult less and do it better
- Tell people how their views have changed things. If the Council can't make the changes people want to see, then explain why this is the case.
- Communities would benefit from improved information on the services that the Council is responsible for, how it uses its resources and what powers and responsibilities it has in a simpler and more easily accessible format. An easy read version of what the Council is trying to achieve should be made available.
- measures must be in place to evaluate the impact of community participation and engagement and demonstrate what it has achieved
- Councillors should be supported to consider a range of methods to engage including use of social media, question & answer sessions, Ward forums.
- Maintain the positive relationships that exist between Councillors, Officers and Community Councils. Review the Code of Practice for the exchange of information between our Council and Community Councils.
- One size does not fit all in our approach to engagement and there should be a continued emphasis on supporting those geographical communities and communities of interest who are seldom heard. Our communities have different levels of interest and capacity to be engaged.

6. Our Objectives

In order to achieve the policy intent of the Strategy we have identified eight specific objectives which will shape the detailed activity we undertake:

Objective 1	To ensure our decision making structures and processes are understood and accessible for individuals and communities
Objective 2	To increase opportunities for individuals and communities to participate and engage in our Council's services and projects
Objective 3	To provide opportunities for individuals and communities to engage with Elected Members at a local and strategic level
Objective 4	To review and implement effective engagement opportunities for Community Councils, MSPs, MPs and MSYPs
Objective 5	To provide support for those seldom heard to enable them to be involved in our participation and engagement opportunities
Objective 6	To improve the quality of engagement activity across all Council services
Objective 7	To ensure that our statutory engagement requirements are effective and efficient
Objective 8	To make the best use of our resources

Examples of how our Objectives link into types of participation and engagement are detailed in Figure 3 below: Figure 3

Co-deliver

Obj 8 Make the best use of our resources

- D&G Health and Wellbeing is a joint unit established in June 2011 with staff from Dumfries and Galloway Council and NHS Dumfries and Galloway. The main purpose is to commission actions to improve health and reduce health inequalities.

Co-define/ Co-design

Obj 5 To provide support for those seldom heard to enable them to be involved in our participation and engagement opportunities.

- We work in partnership with the Community Planning Equality and Diversity Working group to respond effectively to the needs of communities of interest and individuals for the nine protected characteristics

Engagement structures

Obj 8 To make the best use of our resources

- The Community Planning Participation and Engagement Working Group has recently established with a remit that includes the development of a co-ordinated programme of activity across partners and to identify opportunities for joint engagement work to maximise links between related issues and reduce costs.

Consultation

Obj 2 To increase opportunities for individuals and communities to participate and engage in our Council's services and projects

- Our Council undertakes a range of consultations with individuals in order to enable customers and communities to influence the services that affect them. Recent consultations include Future Options for Gracefield Arts Centre, development of the Procurement Strategy 2016-2018 and Carers Strategy.

Information

Obj 3 To provide opportunities for local people to participate and engage with Elected Members at local and strategic level

- Our website provides contact information for all Elected Members, details when surgeries take place and has a search tool to find out who local Councillors are. Details are also provided on the political control of the Council and how to become a local Councillor.
<http://www.dumgal.gov.uk/article/15141/Councillors>

Compliance

Obj 7 To ensure that our statutory participation and engagement requirements are effective and efficient.

- As part of the consultation on the Local Development Plan 2 a participation statement sets out the level of stakeholder involvement in preparing the plan including when, how and with whom consultation will take place.

7. Delivering and Monitoring the Strategy

Delivering the Strategy

- Co-design a Participation and Engagement Framework and Guidance with communities. This will ensure there is a shared understanding about the detailed arrangements for our Council's approaches and by involving individuals and communities in its production, offers the opportunity to build confidence and empower local people
- Training and development of Council officers—primarily through the Consultation Institute five day programme which includes the National Standards, but also in using the Place Standard, Participatory Budgeting; and involvement in the Dumfries and Galloway Participatory Appraisal Network.
- Benchmarking and participation in national groups and events –there are many informal opportunities to share good practice and exchange ideas with other councils and organisations. Formal benchmarking and networks in this area are more limited but we will contribute to their development. Some activity specific opportunities also exist for example the National Participatory Budgeting Network.
- Maximising new technology – the potential to involve a wider group of people (communities of place, for example very rural and remote communities; and also communities of interest, particularly young people) through online opportunities and social media cannot be overestimated. The need to have transparency and accountability does not always sit easily with the immediacy and fluidity of social media applications. Work is already ongoing to develop applications and will continue during the lifetime of this Strategy. Specialist equipment is also being investigated and will be trialled as part of the Framework development with communities and individuals.
- Project Management – our Council is investing in training for officers involved in project management and a key component of this is participation and engagement.

Monitoring the Strategy

- The Action Plan will be a project in the refreshed Communities Business Plan 2017-18 and reported to the relevant Committee. Community representatives will also be involved in the Monitoring of the Action Plan.
- There are already some Performance Indicators in Business Plans relating to Participation and engagement including reference to the Scottish Household Survey and feedback from Area Committee Community Meetings. These indicators will be reviewed and developed as part of the Business Plan Refresh.

8. Evaluation and Review

8.1 The Strategy will be reviewed in 2018, taking into account any recommendations from the Framework and Guidance that is to be co-designed together with communities; the changed arrangements in terms of the Priorities and structures of new Council; and the embedding of the new arrangements for ward working. We would seek to work with communities and key partner organisations including our Third Sector Interface, Third Sector, Dumfries and Galloway.

8.2 A range of evaluative tools will be used to evaluate improvement. A self-evaluation using the Best Value Toolkit - Community Participation and Engagement will be carried out to establish a baseline for 2017 with further self-evaluations planned annually. This Toolkit supports the evaluation of the following areas:

- Commitment and Culture – how well does the organisation demonstrate a commitment to engaging with communities?
- Needs and Aspirations – How well does the organisation understand the needs and aspirations of communities?
- Involvement in decision making – How well are community involved in decision making?
- Do the organisations plans reflect a commitment to community engagement and that progress is monitored and there is sufficient challenge and scrutiny of this progress?
- Change and Impact – What has community engagement achieved?

8.3 Other tools used to assist in the evaluation and review of the Strategy will include:

- Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF) which enables Services to assess and review the quality of their work in this area
- National Standards Feedback Standard which will ensure that we receive feedback from those who participate in consultation processes on how effective the method of consultation was.
- Improved use of Equality Monitoring Forms will enable greater analysis of the responses we receive for consultation activity identifying any gaps from communities of interest or place.
- The Social Capital Index being developed by NHS, D&G will also assist in determining the impact of the Strategy.

Appendix 1

Strategies and Plans linking to the Community Participation and Engagement Strategy

Dumfries and Galloway Council Advocacy and Lobbying Strategy

Dumfries and Galloway Council Anti-Poverty Strategy 2015-2020 - specifically Objective 1 'to listen to people and families experiencing poverty and make sure their voice is heard'

Dumfries and Galloway Council Volunteer Strategy

Dumfries and Galloway Council Community Asset Transfer Strategy

Dumfries and Galloway Community Learning and Development Partners' Strategic Plan 2015-18 – specifically Outcome 3 'Communities and Target groups who benefit from community learning and development have more understanding and involvement in influencing how provision meets identified needs'

Dumfries and Galloway Customer Services Strategy 2015-2018

Dumfries and Galloway Council Digital and ICT Strategy

Integration Joint Board Participation and Engagement Strategy

Dumfries and Galloway Regional Economic Strategy

Strategies in development include:

Dumfries and Galloway Children's Services Plan – this updated Plan is in the final stages of development and will contain an action plan to develop a multi-agency strategy for engaging with children and young people with a focus on vulnerability.

Dumfries and Galloway Council Communications Strategy – currently in its final stages of development the Strategy aims to ensure 'the right message to the right people in the right format at the right time'.

Dumfries and Galloway Council Youth Democracy Strategy – there is a Strategy under development led by the Children, Young People and Lifelong Learning Directorate to give direction on the Council's approach to youth participation and democracy

Appendix 2

Community Participation and Engagement Strategy Action Plan

	Action	Link to Objective(s)	Timescale	Lead
1	Co-design a Participation and Engagement Framework and Guidance with stakeholder reference group of community representatives	2,8	30 Sept 2017	Community Engagement Manager (CEM)
2	Set out the support available to communities and individuals to overcome barriers to participation and engagement, particularly seldom heard groups	5,6	30 Nov 2017	CEM
3	Develop Participatory Budgeting across our Council	2,8	31 Mar 2018	Community Empowerment Officer(Participatory Budgeting)
4	Establish a network of at least 100 officers trained in engagement across the Council	6,7,8	31 Mar 2018	CEM/All Directorates
5	Review and enhance the 'Have Your Say' web page to include greater information on the range of opportunities for engagement and improve feedback on engagement activities.	1,2,5,6,7,8	30 Sep 2017	Business and Technology Solutions(BTS)
6	Create an accessible database for previous and future participation and engagement activity	1,8	31 Dec 2017	BTS/CEM
7	Establish new approaches to Elected Members' Surgeries	3	1 Sept 2017	Democratic Services
8	Implement arrangements for Area Committee Community Meetings/Ward Forums	1,3	30 Sept 2017	Democratic Services/Community Planning and Engagement Manager (CPEM)
9	Create a programme of co-ordinated consultation activity across local partners	2,5,6,8	31 Jul 2017	CEM/local partners
10	Develop the Commission on representation and engagement of people with minority Protected Characteristics	5	30 Jun 2017	CPEM
11	Review and update the Code of Practice for the Exchange of Information with Community Councils	4	1 Oct 2017	Communities Business Manager
12	Map and link together the forums and groups that are in place for the purpose of participation and engagement	1, 2,6,8	31 Mar 2018	CEM
13	Complete a self-evaluation using the Best Value Toolkit - Community Participation and Engagement.	6	30 May 2017	CEM
14	Undertake the Public Service Improvement Framework for Community Engagement and Participation	6	31 Mar 2018	CEM