

Community Involvement Framework: Short Guide

Working together to grow, develop and lead the aspirations for our town.



About this summary

The following summary provides practical tips on how to engage with local communities. It can also be used to support our partners in other public agencies to work more cooperatively, and businesses and commercial partners who supply the council with goods and services.

The summary should be read in conjunction with the Council's Community Involvement Framework, which was approved and adopted by Executive in 2019. The framework sets out in detail how Stevenage Borough Council will engage with its local communities.

Framework

Engaging, involving and empowering communities helps to ensure that we are working more effectively, by addressing the things that really matter to local people. Embedding engagement in our day-to-day work leads to better results and brings about real improvements to people's lives. It also means that we don't need to spend money further down the line correcting the things we got wrong.

The Coronavirus pandemic has shown how impactful communities and services can be when they work together. Maintaining and strengthening our commitment to engagement will help our communities to build the resilience they need, now and into the future.

Who should use this document?

We all need to engage people in the work that we do, which is why everyone employed by the Council should read, and then continue to refer to, this document. People in different business units already do a lot of work engaging with local communities. The Council's Cooperative Neighbourhood Programme brings these plans together so that we can build upon and accelerate this work. There will be other times when the council engages on a thematic or issues basis. This may mean that the council aims to involve residents beyond the needs of their immediate neighbourhood. The same principles should apply.

Sharing good practice

The document will also support colleagues to share their best practice on how to engage and involve local people in the things we do. Taking decisions with local people, and not for local people, enables us to get more things right. It also helps us to build the trust needed to take forward a cooperative way of working.

The five steps to engagement

These are informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering. Some areas of work will have different starting points when beginning the engagement process dependent upon the work already undertaken with local communities. For example, a simple press

release asking people to complete a survey might only go as far as informing and consulting, however, if we support local people to use the findings to design and deliver new services, then we have started to move towards collaboration and empowerment.

Joining-up

Practicing good engagement will help to drive forward a number of interconnected strategies and plans. These include our work on Cooperative Neighbourhoods, Equalities, Climate Change, and Community Wealth Building. Our work in these areas will have a more lasting impact if we work cooperatively.

Good community involvement is at the heart of the way we design and operate services at Stevenage. Housing services embed resident involvement in day to day operations. Regeneration and Housing Development engages with residents on proposals for future development and across a number of service areas such as Parks and the Stevenage Museum, local residents volunteer to help deliver some of our services.

Further Information

To discuss any ideas or seek further guidance please e-mail:

community.development@stevenage.gov.uk

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Putting Involvement into Practice

Engagement Steps	Examples (for illustration only)	Some things to think about
Informing	<p>The Council is about to introduce a new maintenance service for tenants living in social housing. The council promotes this across social media, however, recognising that not everyone has access to this, the service is also promoted through more traditional media, and supplemented by direct mail. Local charities are contacted so that they can update their systems and inform customers without IT.</p>	<p>How can you ensure that your information is reaching all parts of the Community?</p> <p>How do you reach people who do not use social media? For example, during a lockdown? Or those who do not link with council social media feeds?</p> <p>Who can help you to promote your information? For example, charities working with BAME communities.</p>
Consulting	<p>Following the launch of the new maintenance service for tenants, a local Neighbourhood Team suggests that a similar service might also help people on low incomes who live in private accommodation. As a result, a survey was issued to establish levels of interest and potential demand. To ensure a representative sample, the Council worked with local charities to support responses from vulnerable people.</p>	<p>Have you made clear why you are consulting and who you want to respond?</p> <p>Have you identified and then removed barriers to responding for certain groups?</p> <p>Do you know what will happen after you have consulted including how you will provide feedback?</p>
Involving	<p>The survey of tenants also asked residents to put forward ideas for their neighbourhood. One theme that emerged from this was a desire to do something about a green space that had fallen into disrepair. The Neighbourhood Team set up an engagement day in the area and invited those who had responded to the survey. They also engaged passers-by. An interactive zone invited people to draw their plans for the area and to join a working group.</p>	<p>Have you provided opportunities for a broad range of people to become involved?</p> <p>Are you clear on why you are involving people, and can you explain why you are doing this?</p> <p>Have you removed barriers to involvement? For example, by holding events in community venues.</p>

Collaborating	The working group to re-design the green space was facilitated by an officer from Environmental Services, alongside their colleague from Community Development, who supported residents to gain skills in chairing meetings. The group established an action plan for the area with two key objectives. These were to improve and maintain the area, and to utilise their skills to help vulnerable tenants in private housing to maintain their gardens.	<p>Are the roles and responsibilities between all parties clearly understood? For example, is there a main point of contact for the Council?</p> <p>Have the group been supported to undertake a SWOT analysis of their plans?</p> <p>Are measures in place to ensure that the working group continues to be representative of its wider community?</p>
Empowering	A colleague from Housing Services introduced the group to the contractor for the new maintenance service. They offered to mentor the group as part of their commitment to social value. With this support, the group developed a business plan for their two main activities, which included providing volunteering opportunities for their neighbours who are long term unemployed. To take their work to the next level, the group were supported to access a funding workshop organised by a local charitable foundation.	<p>Does the group have enough capacity to implement its ideas?</p> <p>If capacity is an issue, has the group been supported to identify its development needs?</p> <p>How will the group retain its accountability to local people? For example, will it have an on-going relationship with the local Neighbourhood Team?</p>

Some of the benefits of engagement based upon the above examples

- Facilitates join-up between departments and with external agencies, such as contractors and charities.
- Helps to identify the things that really matter to local people and to put in place more lasting solutions.
- Supports contractors to achieve social value that directly benefits local communities.
- Adds to community wealth building, with people and groups reinvesting their resources in the local area.
- Reduces carbon footprint by addressing local priorities with local solutions.