

**DRAFT Community Engagement Framework
Stevenage Borough Council 2019**

A Stronger, more Co-operative Stevenage

The Community Engagement Framework has been developed to provide a clear overview of ways in which the council engages with communities across Stevenage.

The Framework identifies the first set of aims in our engagement, while also acting as a practical resource for use across the council and for partners. This is not the starting block for our work, and in developing this framework, we recognise that good community engagement, co-operative working and innovation in delivery has and is happening across the town for many years. Our commitment to co-operative working and community development remains central to the development of our town. This framework acts as a tool in furthering this work, celebrating success and improving quality engagement even further. Our purpose through this framework is to be clear in our aspirations to improve people's lives, and the quality of public services, ensuring our residents are equal partners in Stevenage as we enter 2020 and beyond.

Strong communities are co-operative communities where individuals, groups and communities work together to grow, develop and lead the aspirations for our town.

Our Co-operative Commitment

Stevenage's Co-operative Principles

In January 2011, Stevenage Borough Council formally became a Co-operative Council and adopted five co-operative principles. These are:

- The council as a strong community leader
- Working together with the community and other agencies to provide services based on needs
- Communities empowered to design and deliver services and play a role in their local community
- A clear understanding between the council and our communities – this is what we do, this is what we will help you to do
- Joined-up and accessible services that offer value for money and focus on the customer.

But what do these really mean?

- We're here when you need us
- We can all support each other
- You can play a part
- We all understand each other
- We're all working together for our town



Our co-operative principles promote and support the close working relationships the council has with the town's residents and organisations. They demonstrate that we will continue to listen and involve community groups and residents in shaping the town.

These commitments are reflected in the council's values

Our co-operative commitments are central to our community engagement framework integrating our co-operative approach with wider community engagement

Diversity and Inclusion in engagement

The council believes in working across our community to ensure all people no matter of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, income, ability or cultural heritage have the opportunity to thrive, enjoy and take part in their town. This community engagement framework builds on our belief that diversity and inclusion is central to stronger co-operative communities.

We believe social cohesion comes from developing understanding and communication across the town, allowing people to explore the issues and ideas that bind communities together.

Our Diversity and Inclusion commitments in engagement are:

- **Providing accessible information that is easy to understand**
- **Understanding communities of place and communities of interest/identity**
- **Providing digital opportunities to engage**
- **Working with groups, services and forums representing minority communities**
- **Enabling the sharing of ideas and aspirations**

Our aims in community engagement

We believe stronger cooperative communities are built on meaningful community engagement, where individuals, groups and neighbourhoods are empowered to find solutions through coproduction of outcomes.

To achieve this our community engagement framework is built the following key aims;

- 1. Investing in the development of stronger communities through people, groups, organisations and neighbourhoods**
- 2. A commitment to community engagement and community development**
- 3. Providing and developing creative ways to engage with our communities, ensuring equality of opportunity in having a voice**
- 4. Celebrating our communities and the role individuals, groups and organisations play in building a stronger more cooperative town**

Our aims are underpinned by commitments on how we will achieve them.

Aim 1 - Investment in the development of stronger communities through people, groups, organisations and neighbourhoods

We will do this by:

- **Providing funding opportunities at a neighbourhood level through Councillor's Local Community Budgets**
- **Support the creation and facilitation of neighbourhood and resident groups, forums and networks**
- **Working co-operatively with communities in mapping community assets and investment needs through our Co-operative Neighbourhood Management programme**
- **Providing opportunities for our young people and older people to influence decision making directly affecting their lives**
- **Providing information and networking opportunities for local groups**

Aim 2 - A commitment to community engagement and community development

We will do this by

- **Investing in community development at a neighbourhood level**
- **Ensuring communities have support in developing their skills and need**
- **Ensuring good communication and response, providing feedback on decision making**
- **Providing opportunities for the coproduction of services and community led development initiatives**
- **Ensuring communities have the right information to make effective choices**

Aim 3- Providing and developing creative ways to engage with our communities, ensuring equality of opportunity in having a voice

We will do this by

- **Promoting and supporting processes that engage and provide representation for communities in decision making**
- **Developing more creative approaches that encourage engagement from all sections of our community, using digital and neighbourhood networks**
- **Provide opportunities for our *protected characteristic communities to come together in exploring the needs of minority communities, groups and organisations.**

Aim 4 - Celebrating our communities and the role individuals, groups and organisations play in building a stronger more cooperative town

We will do this by

- **Celebrating the role of volunteering in building stronger communities**
- **Supporting the further development of vibrant and independent voluntary and community sector**
- **Supporting community leadership and training for individuals, groups and organisations who can make a difference in their neighbourhoods**

***Protected characteristic refers to groups and individuals protected by law under the Equality Act 2010, as a council we also refer to protected characteristic as including those suffering socio-economic disadvantage.**

Our Communities

Our community engagement framework for Stevenage relates to;

The town, its neighbourhoods, wards, specific streets and housing areas. Our framework involves all those who live in; work in; study in or visit Stevenage bringing the town their skills, ideas and community connections

Our definition of ‘community’ also aims to recognise that different people identify themselves in different ways and that we should be sensitive to this when carrying out any type of engagement activity.

A community of place

The places in which we live, work and socialise will often include the people we share our lives, interests and backgrounds with. It may be a place with a physical or locally agreed boundary or simply a shared understanding or ‘feeling’ about a place

Communities of interest or identity

Across the town and within the areas in which we all live some people define themselves in addition to their community of place. This is quite often as part of a group of people with a shared interest or identity/experience

A community of interest or identity can include:

People who often identify themselves or are identified by society or by demographic characteristics, for example, children and young people, faith groups, older people, black and minority ethnic people, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people or people with a shared social background

People with a shared or similar interest may also identify as a community of interest, for example, in shared appreciation and/or membership of sport, art, school groups or community garden

Digital Communities

Digital communities can be based around place, interest or identity. We understand how important digital or virtual communities can be in engagement and aim to ensure our engagement framework understands and embraces digital communities across the town

Engagement

There are many different words used to describe community engagement – ‘participation’, ‘involvement’ and ‘consultation’ are just a few. All of these are types of engagement, and all have their place in achieving an active community voice.

The success of any engagement activity is often related to the level of information, support, training and empowerment that individuals, groups and communities can access. The role of community development in Stevenage is therefore central to this Community Engagement Framework.

‘Community development is about building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives’

(The Community Development Exchange www.cdx.org.uk/what-is-community-development)

No single type of activity is more or less important than another.

For example, the provision of high quality and accessible information is just as important as providing more opportunities for community ownership or control.

Barriers that prevent people getting information, giving their views as part of a consultation or getting more involved in must be considered and addressed as part of the engagement process.

We also believe that it is important that all engagement is linked to an outcome. Individuals, groups and communities must be able to see the impact of giving their time, views and energy, embedding a cooperative approach in our engagement

Good service planning should maximise opportunities for community engagement to test data and community insight and to review customer feedback. This in turn leads to more responsive and effective council services.

Our approach to community engagement

The Community Engagement Framework defines community engagement in Stevenage as incorporating the following range of activities, linking to our Co-operative Council principles



Informing

Informing communities with realistic, balanced and objective information to assist them in identifying and understanding community challenges. Helping communities coproduce alternatives, opportunities and solutions to their community needs.

Case Study

Stevenage Healthy Hub

[The Healthy Hub](#) provides a one-stop-shop for health and wellbeing information and support located near Stevenage town centre in a previously unused space within Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre. The Hub was established and is operated by Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL) working in partnership with the Council and a range of local partners including the NHS, Public Health, and a range of VCSE organisations, some of which provide services in the Hub. Health professionals can refer patients through an exercise referral scheme which includes rehabilitation and management of chronic medical conditions. The Hub provides access to specialist equipment such as an anti-gravity treadmill and a functional electrical stimulation bike which have allowed hundreds of people who could not use standard equipment to become active.

Since opening in January 2016 there have been 528 walk-ins, 820 referrals from health professionals, and 12,307 visitors to organisations based in the Hub. 241 people have been referred to other partners and 287 were signposted to community services.

The Healthy Hub has achieved financial stability through increasing the take-up of exercise referral memberships and hiring rooms to partners. This means it can function independent of any future subsidy.

Consulting

Providing opportunities for community, individual and group feedback on potential choices and decision making. Listening to responses, considering and valuing input, ensuring feedback.

Case Study

Green Paper on Social Housing Consultation

In October 2018 the Government launched their Green Paper on Social Housing for consultation with residents, organisations and local authorities providing social housing needs.

Working in partnership with ARCH (Association of Retained Council Housing) and our resident ARCH lead, the council felt residents views should form a significant part of our response to government.

Our lead resident ARCH member worked alongside Community Development and Performance teams in structuring a special afternoon at the council where local residents and lease holders could come together to explore the green paper, giving local responses, ideas and suggestions based on government recommendations.

Using our customer pool database our team supported the resident ARCH lead to contacting a wide and diverse selection of local people to take part. This resulted in a consultative group of 16 tenants and leaseholders attending the consultation afternoon where refreshments and lunch were provided alongside a support from Community Development and Performance team members.

The consultation exercise was led by the resident ARCH lead member, focusing on each part of the green paper, allowing open discussion and problem solving, while developing a clear Stevenage response.

Results from the consultation were then shared with residents taking part and ARCH through our lead member ensuring local people had a voice in government decision making.

Involving

To work directly and virtually with communities, individuals, groups and partners throughout a process, ensuring the opportunity share ideas, concerns and aspirations in building solutions, new opportunities and considerations for further development.

Case Study

Enabling Social Action Project

Enabling Social Action is a nationwide project running from March 2018 - March 2020 as a collaborative partnership between the Department for Culture Media and Sport and the Universities of Sheffield and Hull.

In June 2018 Stevenage was selected as one of two pilot areas in the roll out of the social action project, based on our innovative work on cooperative neighbourhood management.

Our work with the enabling social action research team has involved an active learning based model of workshops based on the second year of our cooperative neighbourhood programme in St Nicholas and Martins Wood. These workshops have involved researchers, DCMS, the voluntary sector, police, youth services, elected members and our community development team. The focus of workshops has been the sharing of expertise, understanding and ideas in the delivery of

cooperative neighbourhood work and investment. These workshops have already led to a more inclusive and multi-agency approach to future cooperative neighbourhood programme work in 2019/20, allowing changes and adaptations to the delivery of the work that are shared by those working out in our communities and informed by a partnership approach to delivery.

By involving a diverse group of people, outcomes and delivery have changed, through joint learning, joint action and honest discussion

Collaborating

Collaborating with our community, groups or organisations in identifying cooperative solutions to community development. Involving partners at each stage of decision-making and preferred solutions.

Case Study

Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA)

Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse has developed a strategic and co-ordinated approach to tackling and reducing domestic abuse in Stevenage through working with internal and external partners. This co-operative service puts the victim and their family at the heart of the support and involves them in the decision-making.

The service is unique and believed to be the first in the country that encourages organisations to refer victims and their families a Safe Space provided by the council to stay for up to seven nights whilst they make life changing decisions on their future. The service encourages and empowers victims and survivors to make the decision that is right for them. This could include applying for their own orders against the perpetrators and to be able to access support through courses such as “You and Me Mum”. The service has so far supported 85 victims of domestic abuse across the town.

SADA facilitate a monthly SADA Multi-Agency Panel Meeting (mini marac) with partners, which includes Independent Domestic Violence Advisors, Children’s Services, the Mental Health Team, Health Visitors and the Police to discuss “medium and low risk” cases by definition. By using this approach we can help to stop escalation of cases and support the victim by working in partnership with all the agencies including statutory and voluntary sector that are signed up to be part of the SADA partnership.

The SADA partnership also includes the Domestic Abuse Forum, which is a survivors group that informs the direction of the SADA service.

The SADA team also delivers training to neighbouring local authorities and partner agencies in order to build skills and support available to those suffering domestic abuse. By working in this co-operative way, we can help victims, families and our

partners to offer a joined up approach to tackling domestic abuse and helping to keep victims safe.

Empowering

Placing decision making in the hands of the community as a result of engagement, allowing communities to self-identify solutions and take action in building local responses

Case Study

Stevenage Youth Council Conference 2018

Community Development team members worked collaboratively with 13 Stevenage Youth Council members aged 11-18 and Herts Youth Connections this year to organise and deliver a town wide youth conference involving Stevenage secondary schools.

Planning for the youth conference started in March 2018 with youth council members aged 11-18 mapping the issues and needs that they felt were of importance to young people across Stevenage. Our Community Development team and Herts Youth Connections youth workers empowered youth council members to take the lead in this mapping, drawing on experiences, school topics and ideas in coming up with the theme of 'Staying Safe'. As part of their theme young people wished to explore a wide range issues relating to knife crime, personal safety, confidence, mindfulness and conflict before deciding on the key themes they wanted to include in the conference. Community Development and Youth Workers empowered young people to source people who had expertise in the areas they wished to explore, inviting people and organisations into the youth council to help youth council members choose key themes and workshops for the conference. Youth Council members led the selection of workshop themes (Mindfulness, Conflict Resolution and Personal Safety) recruiting organisations to deliver each workshop through example activities, interview and selection.

Young people were also empowered to manage the conference budget, manage the delivery plan and manage the invitations to local schools. The young people successfully managed a financial underspend on the conference this year, while delivering a highly successful and professional conference involving four local secondary schools. By empowering young people to lead the event, the conference enabled young people attending to openly share their concerns and aspirations while empowering five new young people to join the youth council and continue its important work across the town.

Evaluations and learning from the conference are now informing new projects and engagement activities for young people led by youth council members

Our council wide standards for community engagement

Our standards mark our commitment to you in delivering community engagement. These standards apply across council departments, ensuring that you get the best possible standards of engagement

We will

- **Always be clear about why we are engaging**
- **Always be clear about what can and cannot be influenced**
- **Always allow sufficient time for engagement**
- **Always be open, honest and accountable when sharing information and responding to contributions from our community**
- **Always seek to develop partnerships where expertise in specific issues from external organisations can greatly increase success in outcomes**
- **Always provide feedback and be clear on when feedback will be presented**
- **Always monitor, review and learn from engagement activities, involving those taking part**
- **Always seek to ensure wide representation and involve a diversity of individuals, groups and partners**

How will the community engagement framework be monitored and reviewed?

We are committed to continuous assessment and scrutiny in measuring the impact of our Community Engagement Framework. Key performance indicators have been established for the community development service that help to monitor progress against a number of these ambitions. The Framework will be reviewed bi-annually by the community development service, involving the collection of evidence and data from communities across the town via consultation and involvement. These reviews will be made public via our digital platforms.



Current Engagement Structures

The council already engages in multiple ways and formats, and we will continue to support these engagement routes within the new Framework, building on success and challenging our methods to further develop and improve our offer.

