

2007-2010

Community Engagement Strategy



Designed by Chief Executive's Service (2007/00 Oct - 07)



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Securing the future... • Improving services
• Enhancing quality of life • Making the best use of public resources

Foreword

Welcome to the Community Engagement Strategy for Perth & Kinross Council. This Strategy recognises the vast amount of good community engagement activity that is happening across the area. It seeks to harness, improve, extend and better co-ordinate this work and make community engagement a positive, inclusive and effective experience for all those involved.

Perth & Kinross Council is committed to engaging with people across the area to ensure that residents and service users have a greater say in shaping the services which are provided for them. Every effort will be made to ensure that diversity in communities is valued and that services are inclusive and accessible, with a view to securing equality for all.

The Strategy will be used through Council Services and with partners to support and strengthen community engagement in Perth and Kinross.



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Chief Executive

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Our Vision

Our vision is that of a confident and ambitious Perth and Kinross with a strong identity and clear outcomes that everyone works together to achieve. Our area will be vibrant and successful; a safe, secure and healthy environment and a place where people and communities are nurtured and supported.

A dynamic and innovative local Council committed to delivering or facilitating the delivery of excellent services can achieve this vision for Perth and Kinross.

Engaging with communities is part of this process and allows us to achieve excellence through people, through modernising our ways of operating and through working in partnership with other bodies.

Through improving our services, we seek to enhance the quality of life for the people who live and work in Perth and Kinross.



Perth & Kinross Council has an important responsibility to use public resources as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The circumstances by which change is called for are often complex and it is of course simply not possible to meet all expectations on every occasion. Nevertheless, issues and options identified as a result of consultation and engagement will always be taken into account, together with all other relevant factors, in the overall process leading to decisions which will be ultimately taken by the Council.

The Community Engagement Strategy lays the foundation of how we, as a Council committed to improving service delivery, will engage all our stakeholders.

We will continue to improve and look for opportunities to engage those who traditionally do not participate.

The Strategy set out here will clarify what we mean by community engagement, why it is important to us and how we intend to implement it over the next 3 years.

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is the process of involving communities in the planning, development and management of services. For communities, it can be about tackling the problems and issues of a neighbourhood, such as crime, drug misuse or lack of play facilities for children. It can be about involving service users in the re-design of services and improving existing provision. Strong community organisations are central to effective community engagement.



What is Perth & Kinross Council's Community Engagement Strategy?

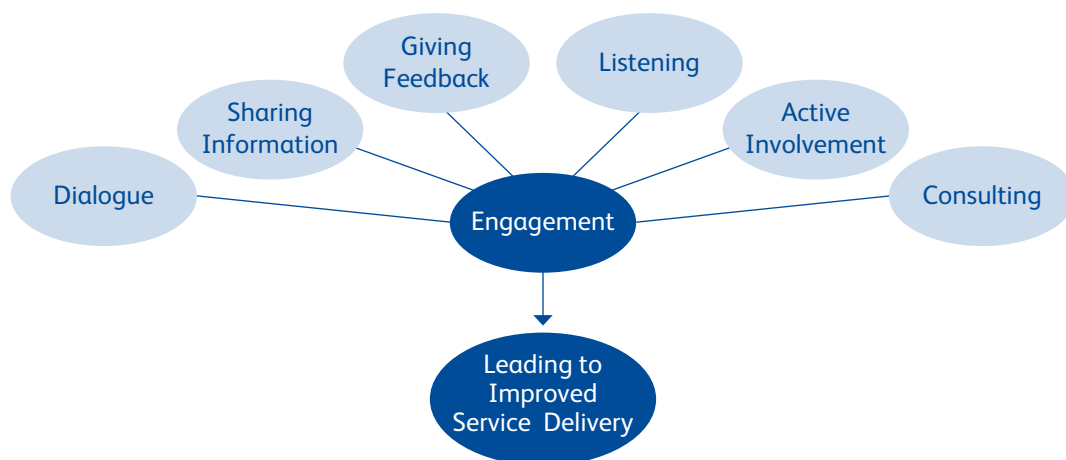
In Perth and Kinross our understanding of a 'community' includes those people who are linked to a particular locality, either through residence, work or regular visits. It also includes communities of interest by which we mean people who have a shared experience that goes beyond their geographical location, for example carers, gypsy travellers, migrant workers and people with disabilities.

Services need to provide ways of including their hard to reach groups in engagement activities by holding them at appropriate times in appropriate venues and by working with partners to ensure that every possible effort has been made to engage in an inclusive manner.

Our strategy will reflect our commitment to engaging with communities across the area to ensure community engagement is efficient, co-ordinated and effective.

Over the next three years our Strategy for Perth and Kinross is to:

- *improve service delivery by developing a better understanding of service users and communities;*
- *encourage community leadership by supporting and developing the engagement of groups and individuals to reduce and overcome barriers to participation;*
- *adopt a range of methods of engagement that are clearly thought through and can be drawn upon to reflect the needs and preferences of intended participants;*
- *work with communities in a co-operative and collaborative way that includes openness, information sharing, a commitment to feedback and the use of plain language;*
- *ensure that Services have access to support and training for community engagement initiatives.*



The diagram above illustrates that engagement is much more than simply consulting but involves the active involvement of service users and citizens. Perth & Kinross Council's Strategy will incorporate all the core elements of community engagement.

Why is this Strategy Important?

Community engagement needs to be a positive, inclusive and effective experience for all those involved. In Perth and Kinross we want all our citizens to know that their views are important to us. This is a long-term strategy and we are committed to getting this right.

The National Standards for Community Engagement developed by Communities Scotland have been adopted by Perth & Kinross Council (see Appendix 1) as a guide to good practice. It is a framework to be used when engaging with communities, organisations, key stakeholders and service users.

What will the Council do during 2007-2010?

Over the next 3 years, we will:

- *support innovation and ideas from the community;*
- *identify problems earlier through using information better and thereby monitoring and improving service delivery;*
- *strengthen local democracy itself through local decision making and citizen involvement.*

Every effort must be taken to ensure that a variety of different mechanisms are used to engage people. This means ensuring that those who do not engage or have previously been unable to engage will have every opportunity to do so in future.

Services will ensure that they adopt 'equality proofing' practice. This consists of a range of activities through which we assess the impact of our structures on different communities and ensure that the needs of all service users are met (see Appendix 3 for material from Scottish Housing Best Value Network as an example).

Internally within Perth & Kinross Council, the Community Engagement Strategy is the overarching framework for engaging with customers and communities; it does not overtake, but rather complements, the Communication Strategy and the Council's Customer First initiative.



Community Engagement in Perth and Kinross

Services provided by the Council make a huge impact on people's lives. The individual citizen, as a service user, purchaser or voter is a key partner in determining the standards and quality of local authority services. Although we already engage with our service users and communities, this strategy aims to improve and expand our efforts.

Within Perth and Kinross there is a wide range of engagement processes already in existence. These operate at different levels ranging from the whole local authority area to local neighbourhoods and with individual people in the role of client, voter, customer or citizen.

The following are just some examples:

- *Community and customer satisfaction surveys (Viewfinder)*
- *Regular user fora (school boards/parent councils/tenants groups)*
- *Attendance at public meetings and consultation events (both regular and one-off events)*
- *Community Councils*
- *Youth fora (youth councils and pupil councils)*
- *Deputations to Council Committees or to Elected Members individually*

All of the above are about making sure that people can participate in lots of ways to make Perth and Kinross an even better place to live, work, study and play. However we want continuously to improve on our performance.

What has the Council been doing?

Over the last year we have been carrying out the following:

- *Delivering raising awareness workshops to staff, partner agencies and members of local communities.*
- *Hosting pilot events such as the 'Let's Talk' in Perth City and 'Have Your Say' in Errol.*
- *Consulting and gaining feedback on the Strategy so that as many stakeholders as possible have had input into it.*
- *Reforming our Youth Council to enable the views of young people to be part of this process.*

In Perth City and Errol we piloted new methods of involving local communities in decision making. Feedback from both was very successful and communities felt very involved in having their say. Both events were held at weekends and were well attended.

Our Approach

This strategy seeks opportunities to streamline communications. Most importantly, it provides an opportunity consistently to feedback on decision making processes and to ensure that communities are aware of the impact of their involvement.

What will the Council do during 2007-2010?

We in Perth & Kinross Council are committed to working with service users and communities. Our approach across the Council will be developed to ensure consistency and impact.



Over the next 3 years, we will ensure:

- *clarity of purpose and roles - participants will be clear about the reasons why they are being involved, what is expected of them and the range of outcomes their involvement will produce;*
- *simplicity and accessibility - decision making processes will continue to be open and transparent;*
- *a positive focus - will be based on building trust within the community which means that it is in everyone's interest to work together to achieve the best possible solutions;*
- *targeted activities - will be aimed at those sections of the community with an interest in the aspect of service in question. Equally, there is no use in engaging communities unless there are genuine prospects of change;*
- *flexibility, innovation and diversity - will be part of our way of working with user groups;*
- *consistent and transparent quality standards - there will be key ingredients of successful community engagement;*
- *clear and consistent communication - will be part of our core business. We will provide appropriate levels of intelligence at the right time in the appropriate way.*

How Do People Engage with the Council?

People engage with the Council for a variety of reasons and for more than one purpose and that the nature of their engagement will change according to their need.

Community engagement is not an abdication of leadership and responsibility on the part of the Council or on the part of the managers of the services it provides, rather it will reinforce the effectiveness of that leadership and bring about greater accountability on the part of the Council and its managers.

Communities and stakeholders should be involved in shaping the provision of local services, however their views will always be but one of a number of considerations to be taken into account in the Council's decision making.

It is important that there is transparency around decision making processes and rationales. The adoption of Best Value Principles is crucial (see Appendix 2 for Best Value Principles).



What will the Council do during 2007-2010?

Over the next 3 years, we will:

- *adopt an evidence based approach to recognise diversity and design inclusive ways of working with all our citizens;*
- *encourage community leadership by offering support and assistance to local community members to participate in local decision making;*
- *address issues of local concern in an open and transparent manner;*
- *demonstrate that managers have negotiated with communities and partners to shape their service planning.*

(a) How will we engage with Service Users?

All Services within Perth and Kinross currently engage with their service users at some point. However, we recognise that we need to be more systematic in the way we undertake this engagement. It is most important how we use the feedback from this engagement to shape the way we provide services. We need to put the service user at the centre of our consideration of the impact we are having.

Over the next 3 years, we will:

- *support all stakeholders in engagement processes, by developing a training programme for local communities, elected members, key staff in the authority and partner agencies with a view to delivering a clear understanding of engagement principles across Perth and Kinross;*
- *improve communications and provide relevant information on services including how to comment on their delivery and development;*
- *develop specific ways of working with service users to ensure their experience is heard and used to change and improve service delivery;*
- *improve the Council's decision making processes to ensure we engage and consult before making policy decisions, rather than after;*
- *make a commitment to provide feedback and explanation to all those involved and affected by subsequent decisions;*
- *put in place within and across Services, effective arrangements for evaluating systematically and rigorously whether outcomes are being achieved.*

(b) How will we engage with Geographical Communities?

Increasingly demanding and articulate citizens expect public services to be as customer-focussed and responsive in

service delivery as the private sector. The need for good customer contact, community engagement and dialogue on service provision has therefore never been greater.

Much of the engagement that we want to undertake will be on a local geographical basis. Over the next four years the ward boundaries will be a basis for developing the relationship between Elected Members, Council Officers and the communities they serve.

In political terms, the new multi-member ward system means that Elected Members will share responsibility for local communities. There will need to be arrangements in place which allow dialogue between Elected Members, Council Services and customers and communities, potentially leading to action.

The need for services to be 'joined up' to address some of the intractable problems in our communities, eg homelessness or poverty will be more widely addressed.

Over the next 3 years, we will:

- *extend our practice and improve the way our Services engage with local communities.*

The Council's Commitment

Our overall approach to community engagement is based on the firm belief that it will add value to the services we provide. In order to do this successfully we need to ensure that review systems are linked to clear targets. We need to evidence the engagement with our communities.

Over the next three years, we have a number of key actions to take.

The Council will:

- *ensure that engagement strategies and skills development are part of the professional 'toolkit' for all staff, so that staff at all levels are better skilled in community engagement;*
- *work at a strategic level to bring together services so that the engagement with communities is as open, transparent, efficient and effective as possible, leading to communities being better informed;*
- *include in Committee Reports reference to community engagement activities where appropriate;*
- *use community engagement to inform the development of Business Management & Improvement Plans of Services.*

How will we know we have achieved this?

Community Engagement is not easy to measure - however ultimately the measure of success will be in improved service delivery to the people of Perth and Kinross. How well we are doing to deliver on our tasks will be monitored through the Organisational Change & Improvement Customers and Communities Group. The achievement

of the overall improvement in community engagement will be monitored and reported annually.

Our overall approach to community engagement is based on the firmly held belief that it will add value and our stakeholders will feel they have been listened to and have influenced change.

We want to continue to be in a position to encourage and support community leadership and to continue to work with our partners in both the private and public sector to bring the very best of services to the people of Perth and Kinross.

Over the next 3 years, we will:

- *measure the inputs to consideration of issues such as the number of engagement activities undertaken and the number and range of people involved, and the change in service delivery as a result;*
- *ensure that Services have effective arrangements for evaluating systematically and rigorously the outcomes of community engagement;*
- *measure the outputs and the number of practitioners using good practice to engage communities;*
- *measure the outcomes and changes in services to engagement activities.*

We will then use this information to evaluate and feedback on our progress.

Making it Happen

It is worth remembering that the thrust of the Strategy is to improve service delivery and make more effective the Council's role in the community. It builds on much of the existing activity; it signals a step change in our determination as service providers to improve services by getting even closer to and understanding more clearly the experiences of those who use them.

The challenge is of course to make this happen.

Ultimately we would want to see:

- *increasing citizen confidence;*
- *improving meaningful levels of engagement conducted in an open and transparent manner;*
- *raising general satisfaction with the delivery of Council services;*
- *engaging with those who traditionally do not participate.*

Overall, as a result of successful community engagement, the Council will be viewed as a modernising organisation with a reputation for high quality delivery, and most importantly the people of Perth and Kinross will be even better served.



1 **The Involvement Standard**

We will identify and involve the people and organisations who have an interest in the focus of engagement.

2 **The Support Standard**

We will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement.

3 **The Planning Standard**

We will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this evidence to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken.

4 **The Methods Standard**

We will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.

5 **The Working Together Standard**

We will agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently.

6 **The Sharing Information Standard**

We will ensure that necessary information is communicated between the participants.

7 **The Working With Others Standard**

We will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement.

8 **The Improvement Standard**

We will develop actively the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants.

9 **The Feedback Standard**

We will feedback the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected.

10 **The Monitoring and Evaluation Standard**

We will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purposes and meets the national standards for community engagement.

Appendix 2

- *Commitment and leadership*
- *Responsiveness and consultation*
- *Sound governance at a strategic, financial and operational level*
- *Sound management of resources*
- *Use of review and options appraisal*
- *Competitiveness, trading and the discharge of authority functions*
- *A contribution to sustainable development*
- *Equal opportunities arrangements*
- *Joint working*
- *Accountability*

1 Consult and involve people who have a stake in the Service:

- *at the start of the process;*
- *using relevant methods for targeted audiences;*
- *remembering specific requirements of participants;*
- *by increasing access to the process: venue choice, material formats, incentives, time of activity.*

2 Assess the organisation's delivery frameworks for:

- *potential discrimination in policies, procedures and practice;*
- *ways to make services more accessible;*
- *risks and resources;*

using:

- *customer and stakeholder views;*
- *information from various sources - census, household surveys.*

3 Deliver a Service that:

- *is responsive to the findings from consultation and assessment;*
- *values diversity;*
- *understands and meets local needs;*
- *involves people from local communities in service planning and development.*

4 Feedback to let the people you have involved know what decisions have been taken:

How/Whether:

- *their contribution has been taken into account;*
- *practice changes are being/have been implemented as a result of their input.*

That:

- *their views and involvement are valued.*