

**To review the Council's engagement activities, including Neighbourhood Management**

**To review how community engagement could be improved and what groups the Council should be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented**



**NORTHAMPTON**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Report of the Overview and Scrutiny  
Community Engagement Task and Finish Group**

**SEPTEMBER 2007**

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## Foreword

The Task and Finish Group covering 'Community Engagement' was established by Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 - "Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement" in order to perform a short, focused review of how the Council might engage more comprehensively with the residents of Northampton; particularly new and emerging communities who are difficult to reach. Specific attention was paid to the role and function of Neighbourhood Management and Partnerships in achieving this objective.

The Task and Finish Group consisted of Councillors Paul Varnsverry (Chair), Tony Clarke, David Palethorpe and Portia Wilson, who considered both written and verbal evidence from a wide range of community groups - including residents' associations, religious organisations and parish councils - the council's community forums, the voluntary sector and officers of the council. Comments were invited on where the Council engages productively with communities and where greater efforts need to be made. This was complimented by a desktop based research study of best practice operated by councils from across the country widely acknowledged as success stories in the area of community engagement.

The work of the Task and Finish Group took place between July and September 2007.

The result is a comprehensive body of work which identifies areas where the Council needs to make change to achieve improved community engagement, with recommendations for how this should be done.



### **Councillor Paul Varnsverry**

Chair of the Community Engagement Task and Finish Group

### **Acknowledgements to all those who took part in the Review:-**

- Councillors Tony Clarke, David Palethorpe and Portia Wilson, who sat with me on the Task and Finish Group
- Councillors Brendan Glynane, Brian Markham and David Perkins for attending a meeting of the group and providing the benefit of their experience
- Mr. Chris Swinn, for speaking on rules regarding public addresses at Council meetings
- Thomas Hall (Corporate Manager), Lindsay Cameron (Participation Team Leader) and Lindsey Ambrose (Area Partnerships and Forums Co Ordinator) for giving evidence essential to the group achieving its objectives
- Tracy Tiff (Scrutiny Officer) for providing invaluable advice and helping compile the final report
- Simone Wade (Policy and Governance Manager) for her assistance with scoping the review and providing details of supporting work programmes

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Task and Finish Group was set up to review the Council's engagement activities, including Neighbourhood Management and to review how community engagement could be improved and what Groups the Council should be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new and difficult to reach communities who are not currently represented.

A significant amount of evidence was heard, details of which are contained in the report. After gathering evidence the Task and Finish Group established that: -

The Task and Finish Group recognises that the web-based resource of information on community engagement that is being produced by Involve, that has yet to be published, could be a useful tool for the Authority when carrying out consultation.

The Task and Finish Group realises the need for reports to Full Council, Cabinet and other Council meetings to contain an implications paragraph on Community Engagement and Consultation. There is a need for a gatekeeper to ensure that all reports contain these details.

The Council has spent resources on the development of numerous Strategies for Community Engagement and none have been fully resourced or implemented. The Borough's Strategy for Communications and Consultations which is published on the Council's Intranet site has not been approved.

Northampton Borough Council does not have a Consultation Toolkit. Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit has been recognised as an example of best practice and would provide a useful template for a Consultation Toolkit for the borough.

It is acknowledged that Overview and Scrutiny has a rigorous monitoring process and the Portfolio Holder is requested to provide a progress report six months after the report has been accepted by Cabinet and further monitoring is undertaken until all recommendations have been implemented. However, the Task and Finish Group feels that it needs to be emphasised that all Overview and Scrutiny Review reports be enacted and the accepted recommendations monitored.

There is a need to find ways to encourage citizens to speak at public council meetings. The Task and Finish Group challenges the culture and the Council's Constitution in relation to public speaking and how it impacts on the Council's image.

The Council appears to be in defensive mode and often buries bad news stories rather than publish them. It is acceptable for the Council to report that as an authority it has failed and to accept and acknowledge any mistakes made.

A lot of citizens have expressed concern at the loss of Area Partnerships and there is a need to demonstrate that momentum has not been lost for example Neighbourhood Managed Area meetings should be held quarterly.

Amongst all options that should be considered to improve public consultation consideration should be given to both internal and external support for the consultation process including examining all forms of communication, for example, pre recorded telephone calls, texts.

The Task and Finish Group feels that it needs to be recognised that the Neighbourhood boundaries are not fixed and may need to be reviewed once sufficient evidence for change is established. These boundaries may change and evolve.

The Task and Finish Group recognises the important part that Neighbourhood Partnerships both managed (with officer support) and unmanaged (self run) will continue to play in the Council's Community Engagement Strategy. There is a need for each area (managed and unmanaged) to have its own Communication/Participation Plan that is resourced by the Council. Feedback mechanisms need to include regular reports to the relevant Council departments, and whilst managed areas have coordinators in place the Council needs to ensure that all areas, managed and unmanaged, have support to enable the development and implementation of a Community Engagement Strategy and the plans within each co-ordinated area.

The Task and Finish Group suggested that, where the Council is aware of any overlap of duties between those of a Neighbourhood Partnership, and those of a Parish Council, in areas where there is an active Parish Council which would prefer not to see a Neighbourhood Partnership within their area; as long as the Parish Council signs up to and complies with the Council's Protocol, for example by hosting public meetings, the Council should state that the Parish Council will undertake the function and role of the Neighbourhood Partnership. This may necessitate, after consultation, a change to Neighbourhood boundaries as in 4.10 above.

In order for the Council to carry out effective consultations there is a need for a budget specific for consultation exercises.

Comment was made from some of the expert witnesses that the Council needs to do more to engage with hard to reach groups.

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations.

The Task and Finish Group requests that all of the recommendations detailed below are implemented in order that the improvements that this Task and Finish Group seeks can be delivered:

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 That reports to all Committees contain an implications paragraph on Community Engagement and Consultation. Meetings Services should act as the gatekeeper to ensure that all reports contain these details and reject any reports that do not contain the relevant information.**
- 5.2 That, once published, the web-based resource of information on community engagement that is being produced by the organisation 'Involve', be used by all departments when carrying out consultation.**
- 5.3 That a Strategy for Community Engagement be devised which reflects organisational priorities and increased partnership working in accordance with the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)'s devolved structures. It should be recognised that this is an evolving area.**
- 5.4 That as Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit has been recognised as an example of best practice (Copy attached at Appendix F) this document be considered as a template for a Consultation Toolkit for borough Council staff.**
- 5.5 That for the public to be more trusting of the Council, it has to be open and transparent in reporting all of its activities. All public information should therefore be widely available and published.**
- 5.6 That the mechanisms for receiving public feedback be examined and a policy produced. The mechanisms for reporting back from Neighbourhood Management need to ensure that information received is reported to the relevant Council departments and Councillors.**
- 5.7 That the philosophy of Neighbourhood Management is extended across the whole town. Each area should have its own Communication/Participation Plan that is resourced by the Council. Within this there should be a feedback mechanism.**
- 5.8 That Neighbourhood Partnerships be fully resourced in order that their role can be enhanced and that they form part of each area's plan (as described in recommendation 5.7) should this be appropriate for that area.**
- 5.9 That Parish Councils be contacted and provided with details of the plans for Neighbourhood Management. It should be stated that where the Council is aware of any overlap of duties and in that area there is an active Parish Council that the Parish Council complies, for example by hosting public meetings. The Council would not wish to be involved but it would need to ensure that Parish Councils sign up to its Protocol if a particular Parish Council, after public consultation, did not want a Neighbourhood Partnership within their area. This will form part of the area's plan as described in recommendation 5.7.**

- 5.10 That it be recognised that the Neighbourhood boundaries are not fixed and may need to be reviewed once sufficient evidence for change is established.**
- 5.11 That the Council recognises that in order to consult with hard to reach groups it will have to consider how best to inform those in the community whose contact with the Council is minimal. These will include passive members of the community who have limited social engagement, members of the community for whom English is not their first language, members of the community who take a disinterest in the administration of Local Government. In order to reach these groups the Council should consider how to ensure that information written in clear, concise language can be delivered beyond people's front doors and/or is communicated to them via the social networks they are engaged in.**
- 5.12 That a consultation budget be implemented. Analysis should take place to ascertain the amount of resource required.**
- 5.13 That consideration be given to internal and external mediums for the consultation process to ensure that cost effective and modern forms of communication are considered.**

# Northampton Borough Council

## Overview and Scrutiny

### Report of the Community Engagement Task and Finish Group

#### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the Task and Finish Group was to review the Council's engagement activities, including Neighbourhood Management and to review how community engagement could be improved and what Groups the Council should be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new and difficult to reach communities who are not currently represented.
- 1.2 A copy of the Scope of the Review is attached at Appendix A.

#### 2. Context and Background

- 2.1 A Councillor Task and Finish Group was established. There were no co-opted members for this review. However the Group realised the need for all Task and Finish Groups to consider the provision of an external advisor.
- 2.2 The Task and Finish Group agreed that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council's corporate priorities: -
  - An analysis of the Council's current method of engagement, including successes and failures of engaging with the community
  - A synopsis of all information currently available
  - Officer reports/presentations
  - Maps showing how areas are currently geographically split
  - Best practice external to Northampton
  - Witness interviews/evidence
- 2.3 This review links to the Council's corporate priorities as it demonstrates listening to local people and providing the services that they need. (Corporate Priority 1 refers)

#### 3. Evidence Collection

In scoping this review it was decided that evidence would be collected from a variety of sources:

##### 3.1 Expert Witnesses

- 3.1.1 Core questions were devised and issued to all witnesses providing evidence to the review. A summary of all written responses is detailed below. Copies of all written evidence received is attached at Appendix B. A copy of the core questions is attached at Appendix C.



### 3.1.2 Key points of evidence: -

- The Council does not consult very well with specific groups, e.g. Residents Associations, often they read about consultation exercises in the local press
- The Budget Consultation 2007/2008 was good but little else is
- There is often short notice for feedback which causes problems as most Groups meet just once a month. Many Residents' Associations have newsletters which could include consultation questionnaires
- Very few people attend Area Partnership meetings. The Council has attempted a fair consultation process, for example, the Budget Setting Consultation, but this only reach a small proportion of residents
- The Council does consult with Community Groups particularly in the neighbourhood renewal role. Overall a more hands on approach is needed
- Some very small groups feel left out and therefore do not respond
- The Council consults fairly well on major issues
- The Council's current community engagement practices make it relatively easy for highly motivated and experienced people to engage with the Council, but difficult for those who are less informed or less motivated. The Council has forums and area structures which play an important role, but with limited numbers of largely 'self selecting' people
- There has been inconsistency from consultation to consultation due to the obvious lack of strategy, protocols and rules of engagement
- Northampton Federation of Residents' Associations could be used better, for example, information sent to it in advance then presentation and feedback given at a meeting
- The consultation mechanism could be improved by direct contact and visits to organisations, events and meetings. Regular contact must be maintained so that they feel their needs and views are valued
- Not all Community Groups are adequately consulted
- Groups specially singled-out for communication should include Parish Councils, Residents' Associations, and Neighbourhood Watch Groups, as members of such organisations are in touch with any problems occurring in their communities, and also keep abreast of local opinion.
- The Council consults the Community Safety Partnership on matters relating to Community Safety and Crime with the context of the Partnership itself. The partnership has itself limited direct engagement with its communities.
- All Groups that are registered with the Council should be notified of forthcoming consultations
- There is a need for major publicity drive for consultation
- Consultation in itself is insufficient. Residents must have feedback on their observations and feel that their voices are being
- It would be beneficial to have a Residents Liaison Officer, which would ensure strong links between the Residents' Groups and the Council.
- Local Councillors do attend Residents' Association meetings but a Liaison Officer would provide more ready access and would allow more mobility with common problems in different areas being readily identified
- There should be more consultation with Disabled Groups and Disabled people

- In the area of Community Safety, the Council struggles to engage with hard to reach groups and new emerging communities. There is little evidence of engagement with these communities and little collection of data that enables the 'real picture' to be obtained. Attempts at regular contact with community groups should be evidenced. Groups consulted should include the 'geographic' as well as the 'special interest'
- Neighbourhood Partnerships do not work. They seem to discuss the same issues and no progress is made. Other Agencies rarely attend
- Neighbourhood Partnerships is a mechanism to let people air their views but nothing appears to be done as an outcome
- Neighbourhood Management has not been adequately explained to most Groups. Therefore the importance of sending representatives to the first meetings was not recognised
- Neighbourhood Management is too big and meetings are not open to the general public
- Neighbourhood Management is in its embryonic stage and is untried and untested but there could be a huge problem in the lack of common model between the different Neighbourhood Managed Areas
- There would appear to be an attempt to engage with interested parties but often the organisations that need to engage are often less than enthusiastic about the consultation
- Neighbourhood Management and Partnerships work very well with all Agencies working together. It is important for there to be a Working Group in place after the project has concluded in order to maintain and sustain the work that has been carried out
- The two-tier structure of neighbourhood engagement is causing problems. Area partnerships in the managed areas have ceased to exist, and their replacement is unclear. In the non-managed areas there is a feeling of resentment and uncertainty, coupled with anger at the lack of engagement of the County Council.
- Neighbourhood managed areas have been chosen on the basis of pockets of deprivation and then expanded to create a critical mass population. Neighbourhood Management Area (NMA) Boards - appear to be officer dominated feudal fiefdoms of self appointed, selected and un-elected members of certain but not all Resident Associations that have no democratic mandate that meet in secret in closed meetings to which the residents at large are not invited
- All groups and individuals should be invited to participate, some will attend, others may use the website and others may prefer to complete questionnaires. Contact stalls such as those used at Milton Keynes would be a good way to consult
- The Council should locate and visit all the meetings of all Community Groups
- While consultation has been undertaken in the Neighbourhood management priority areas to determine those communities' priorities, it is still in its infancy and a robust two way engagement process is still to be finalised. It has also suffered from lack of continuity with managers to take this issue forward. To work, the community will need to get to know and trust their local neighbourhood manager, and they need to be empowered to influence decision-making at the local level

- Due to strategic changes with the Council over the past year or so, resident representation has failed to continue on various groups such as Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Strategic Partnerships. Resident representation is the essential key to making residents of Northampton secure in the knowledge that their voice is being heard and listened to
- If encouraged, 'new communities' will engage. They often do via Legal Rights forums, Refugee forums and similar. The Council should establish where they do engage, then go to them, not always expect them to come to us
- Quite often groups are only consulted when it suits the case or when there is an outcry regarding a particularly sensitive issue. There needs to be standards and processes in place to allow the community to be consulted on many more matters that affect the general public with more openness and accountability.
- Area Partnership Meetings and CASPAR Meetings, usually have a selection of local Councillors, and quite often Council employees in attendance. These meetings are not publicised sufficiently, and more members of the general public should be notified of the existence of these meetings, and encouraged to attend.

3.1.3 Various witnesses were invited to attend a meeting and provide evidence: -

**3.1.3.1 Corporate Manager (Community Safety, Leisure and Town Centre Operations)**

The Corporate Manager (Community Safety, Leisure and Town Centre Operations) attended the meeting on 13 August 2007 (A copy of the minutes of that meeting is attached at Appendix G)

Key points of evidence: -

- The Council undertakes consultation both with geographic groups – neighbourhoods for example – and sectoral groups. This happens mainly when there are specific issues relating to those groups, rather than using them to get views on general issues. A consistency or co-ordination to this is lacking, either in when it is done or how quality is ensured.
- It will always be easier for the Council to make links with groups that are more self-aware, usually well established and articulate, and may be localised.
  - Systematic – the Council's consultation should be planned with a purpose and integrated into other planning and decision-making processes
  - Quality – consultation needs to be thought through and delivered well by people who understand the issues and pitfalls. But it also needs to give value for money, and the benefits from doing it should be spelled out in advance, along with the costs

- Culture – The Council does not yet always see consultation (still less engagement) as a positive way of improving what we do, to be welcomed
- Consultation could be improved by the Council having a bank of accessible knowledge for consultation that it could confidently rely upon the results.
- There is a need for feedback to be given to those who participate in consultation.
- it will be the more established individuals and groups who will fit most easily into Neighbourhood Management (NM) structures unless the Council makes a determined effort to reach beyond them.
- The geographical approach of NM supplemented with the ‘sectoral’ approach based on factors like age, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, gender is right. The Council should be able to engage with those who are ‘hard to hear’ but also encourage communities which have organised themselves to have a part.
- The other groups which the Council may be in danger of ignoring are the non-residents, particularly businesses and those who work or play in the town.

#### **3.1.3.4 Ward Councillor for Eastfield**

The ward Councillor for Eastfield attended the meeting on 13 August 2007 and provided a response to the Task and Finish Group’s core questions. (A copy of the minutes of that meeting is attached at Appendix G).

Key points of evidence:

- Consultation and Engagement are often treated as being the same thing. They are not.
- The Council has over recent years been keen to improve both consultation and engagement but this work has been left to a small number of, sometimes excellent, people but is not embedded throughout the organisation.
- Community Groups may be consulted but “*Are their views able to influence outcomes?*” may be a better question.
- By devoting more time to both information and consultation but being clear which is which would improve the Council’s consultation mechanisms.
- The Borough and partners have signed up to developing a Neighbourhood Management model for both engaging the community and for delivery of improvement of services as identified in the LAA. Yet

there appears to be little coordination between the various Managed Areas and Coordinated Areas.

- The Council should be seeking to engage everyone not groups or sections of society.

### **3.1.3.5 Area Partnerships and Forums Co-Ordinator**

The Borough Council's Area Partnerships and Forums Co-Ordinator attended the meeting on 23 August 2007 (A copy of the minutes of that meeting is attached at Appendix H).

The Key points of evidence were: -

- The Youth Forum is acknowledged as a high flyer in the county.
- The Disabled People's Forum has been involved, along with others, in the statutory consultation required to devise a Disability Equality Scheme. The engagement would be better in future if the Forum's objectives were to specify a responsibility around this.
- The Pensioners Forum recently made links to countywide working through Northamptonshire County Council's Active Ageing Network and Northants Older People's Advisory Group; Older People's Champion for NBC now a member; it would be better to have more direct links to the Local Area Agreement.
- The Lesbian Gay and Bi Sexual (LGB) People's Forum and NIAG (Northampton Inter-Agency Group - Hate Crimes Forum) is strong in a 'representative' way, but relies heavily on a currently mostly unfunded relationship with Northampton Lesbian Gay and Bisexual Peoples Association ( NLGBA) to work well.
- The Race Equality Forum and MAGRAH (Multi Agency Group Against Racial Harassment) - The development of Northampton Borough Council's Race Equality Scheme has been much more officer-owned than that of the disability equality scheme, so the forum has had little inputs – just periodically heard updates and been able to comment. Progress towards the Equality Standard has also been slow over past years.
- The Women's Forum has lacked clear objectives and terms of references. Its meetings have been poorly attended. The Agenda-style lunchtime 'minutes meetings' is not engaging with a broad spectrum of women.
- The Council could make better use of its existing engagement and consultation mechanisms.
- The Council needs to do more planning about how, when and why to involve residents via Neighbourhood Partnerships and Forums.
- The Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved by putting a simple web page on the NBC web pages that links to the various types of meeting we have and explaining rules for attendance, speaking, handing in petitions and letters.
- When the Council carries out surveys it would be good if it could improve its questionnaires.

- Use plain English wherever possible. Check it is not only plain but also right for different groups by asking Forums to check over draft documents.
- There is a need to create safe spaces for particular communities of interest to be able to engage in person too to discuss in more detail issues re disability, sexuality. There is the need for a structure which has Forums, Neighbourhood Managed Areas and Neighbourhood Partnerships working more closely and awareness of this with Northamptonshire County Council across its service areas.
- The Council should be working in the localities and also through town-wide forums to engage effectively
- There should be customer service standards in respect of following up action points from meetings by the officers who attend them

### **3.1.3.6 Vice Chair, Northampton Tenants and Council Together, (NTACT)**

The Vice Chair, NTACT, submitted a written response to the Task and Finish Group's core questions (Copy attached at Appendix C) and attended the meeting on 23 August 2007 to provide comment on public speaking at Council meetings.

The main points of evidence were:-

- Up until September 2006 citizens had had the right to address Full Council on any agenda item. This right had now been removed.
- The public can now only address Full Council on Motions.
- Citizens may wish to address Full Council meetings under the agenda item 'Portfolio Holder Presentations' and Policy items.
- The Council should welcome input from residents and visitors to the town and make information readily available.
- All information should be published, including 'poor' information,
- Many Councillors now do not hold surgeries.
- Area Partnerships were a failure and there is a need for Councillors to engage at 'grass roots level.' For example that in Australia, Street Committees are held before the reports are discussed by the Local Council.
- At Mayor Making on 24 May 2007, the Monitoring Officer put Political Structures on the agenda without prior notification and the public had no opportunity to address Full Council because it was 'Invitation Only'. The legal requirement is to publish an agenda five working days prior to the meeting. If a report is not available at the time of agenda dispatch it should be deferred to the next meeting.
- The deadline for submission of written questions by the public is often exceeded by the production of the very papers upon which they are expected to raise questions.

### 3.1.3.7 Member of the Constitutional Working Party

A member of the Constitutional Working Party provided details of the reasoning and decision for the Public Speaking Protocol that was introduced in September 2006.

The main points were:-

- The Constitutional Working Party was charged with the responsibility of providing recommendations to update the Councils constitution and was appointed in the light of the “Poor” status given to Northampton Borough Council following the Audit Commissions Comprehensive Performance Assessment report in 2004/5. It was acknowledged that part of the problem was to update the workings of Council, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny.
- It was agreed by all the party representatives on the Working Group that democratic engagement was to be encouraged but it was also recognised that in the past the way in which the public had been allowed to engage at these meetings had resulted in meetings being hijacked to the point where the business of the Council was being disrupted.
- It was recognised that the authority of the Council had been diminished by repeated meetings where important statutory reports had been tabled for discussion at Council but had either not been discussed or limited discussion had taken place due to lack of time. Quite often the reason for this was that precedence was given to debating political motions rather than the statutory business of Council. The all party working group acknowledged that for the Council to improve its “Poor” status it was essential to change the way these meetings were conducted whilst at the same time preserving the right for the community to engage with the elected representatives.
- The following was therefore agreed:
  - **Council**
  - A half hour slot is included at the early part of the Council agenda for the public to put questions to Council. A notice period is required for such questions. If any questions are unanswered at the end of this period a written response is to be provided.
  - Motions will be debated after Council business has been attended too and the public will have the right to speak to motions on giving the appropriate notice.
  - Prior to the Council meeting, if the party whips and leaders agreed that an issue had emerged which was of such interest to the public that to allow it to be debated during a Council meeting would result in

insufficient time being available for a) the issue to be aired probably and b) for the Council to conclude its own business, then a separate public meeting will be organised at the earliest possible time to enable the issue to be debated.

- ***Cabinet***

- The right of the public to speak at cabinet was retained subject to the appropriate notice being given of the desire to speak. A limit of 3 minutes was given for each speaker.

- ***Overview and Scrutiny***

- The right of the public to speak at Overview and Scrutiny was retained. Prior notice is not required and members of the public who wish to speak to the committee would indicate to the chairman.

## **3.2 Policy and Governance Manager**

3.2.1 The Policy and Governance Manager provided baseline data on: -

### **3.2.1 Background to Community Engagement in the Borough**

3.2.2.1 Northampton Borough Council (NBC) has very recently moved from Area Partnerships to a new way of working in partnership with Northants Police and Northamptonshire County Council. In line with recommendations from Central Government about working in neighbourhoods, the local area working has been revised down to small groupings of residents, a total of 13 in all. The major determinant for the boundaries is the new structure for delivery of Police Services, with areas seeking to be co-terminal with the areas covered by the new Safer Communities Police Teams. The amount of Police service inputs and other service inputs now aligns to these delineated areas, with six areas of more deprivation and Policing issues receiving higher levels of service under a 'managed' area approach with an individual Neighbourhood Management Co-Ordinator. These six areas and partnership working in them relate also to obligations and objectives of partnership working under the Local Area Agreement. There is a general ambition for other areas of Northampton to ultimately develop more enhanced 'local' focus of service provision.

3.2.2.2 NBC completed a Service Review of Forums and Area Partnerships in autumn 2006. As a Community Strategy is produced further details of the review will become available.

3.2.2.4 NBC has very recently decided to share Northamptonshire County Council's Customer Panel for consultations.

3.2.2.5 NBC has supported the Voluntary and Community Sector Forum.

3.2.2.6 NBC has supported the community through grants funding. This is now due to be reviewed as per a public commitment by Councillor Tim Hadland,



following complaints from the community about the existing structure and handling of community grants in spring 2007.

### **3.2.2.7 Map detailing the geographical area of Neighbourhood Partnerships**

3.2.2.8.1A map detailing the geographical area of Neighbourhood Partnerships was provided. Details of which can be located on the Council's website [www.northampton.gov.uk](http://www.northampton.gov.uk)

### **3.3 Scrutiny Officer**

3.3.1 The Scrutiny Officer provided baseline information on: -

#### **3.3.1.1 Groups that the Council currently engages with**

3.3.1.2 To find out which Groups and Communities the Council currently engages with contact was made with various Council departments.

3.3.1.2 The list below is not exhaustive but should include the majority of groups that the Council regularly consults and engages with: -

- Disabled people via the Disabled Peoples Forum
- Gay, Lesbian and Bi-Sexual people (Lesbian, Gay and Bi-Sexual Peoples Forum)
- Members of the Race Equality Forum
- Young People through the Youth Forum
- Older people via the Pensioners Forum
- Council Tenants through Northampton Tenants and Council Together (NTACT). Tenants are also individually consulted.
- Local people via the Neighbourhood Partnerships and Local Residents Associations
- Parish Councils
- Local Retailers via the Town Centre Partnership
- St David's Neighbourhood Management Board and the Thorplands, Rectory Farm and Lumbertubs Neighbourhood Management Board
- Thorplands Community Co-Op
- Thorplands Football Club
- Bellinge Community House
- Bellinge CASPAR Plus
- Blackthorn Good Neighbours
- Store House Church/ Lodge Farm Management Committee
- Age Concern
- Need to know shop, Kings Heath
- Semilong Community Forum
- Jesus Fellowship
- Young Mens' Christian Association (YMCA)
- Religious Organisations through the Faith Forum and through Mayoralty events including
- Royal British Legion
- Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SAFFA)
- Northampton Federation of Townswomen's Guild
- Allotment Associations

- Disabled Interests – Ability Northants
- Health Service
- Emergency Services
- Conservation Action Communities
- Various Organisations such as: -
  - The Wantage Gospel Trust
  - Princes Foundation
  - Northampton Friends of the Earth
  - River Nene Regional Park
  - The Wildlife Trust
  - Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition
  - East Midlands Sports
  - Northamptonshire Racial Equality Council
  - Northampton Women's Aid
  - Northampton Door to Door Service (NDDS)
- Other Ethnic Minority Community Groups, including: -
  - Asian Men Sports & Social Club
  - Indian Hindu Welfare Organisation (IHWO)
  - African Caribbean Elders Society
  - Council for Ethnic Minorities Communities (Northampton)
  - Northampton Connolly
- Voluntary Interests, including:-
  - Northampton Landlords' Association
  - Friends of Bradlaugh Fields
  - Northampton Rail Users Group
  - Northampton & Lamport Railway
  - Northamptonshire Environmental Forum
  - Nene Flood Prevention Alliance
  - SOS Campaign
- Local Scout / Girl Guide Brownie packs including:
  - Thrapston Brownies
  - St Paul's Cubs & Scout Group
  - Weston Favell Cubs
  - 22nd Whitehills Scout Group
  - 29th Sunnyside Scout Group
- Duston Luncheon Club
- Go Getters Club
- Simon de Senlis Court (Sheltered Housing Group)
- St John's Rest Home
- St Andrew's Church group
- Cameleon Writers Group
- D Day Dodgers (Re Enactment Group)
- Sealed Knot (Re Enactment Group)
- Tommy Atkins Society
- Northamptonshire Black History Association
- Looking Glass Theatre
- Alliston Gardens Community Centre, Semilong

- Spring Boroughs Community Group
- Northampton General Hospital Outreach Group
- Nene Adults with Learning Difficulties Group
  - Bosworth Independent College -
- Evacuee Reunion Association
- National Autistic Society - Northamptonshire Branch

### 3.3.1.2 Glossary of Terms

3.3.1.2.1 The Borough Council's Strategy for Communications and Consultations states in its criteria section: -

#### **Criteria Two**

##### 3.1 Clear

Use plain language: avoid jargon and only use technical terms where absolutely necessary. A consultation should be as accessible as possible. Explain complicated concepts as clearly as possible and, where there are technical terms, use a glossary.

3.3.1.2.2 Overview and Scrutiny has produced an Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit and Guidance Booklet for Co-Opted members. Within these documents a glossary of terms is included. Attached at Appendix D is the glossary of terms contained in the Co-Optee Guidance Booklet.

3.3.1.2.3 The Area Partnerships and Co-Ordinator uses a 'Council Speak Bingo Card' that contains a glossary of Council terminology for young people on the Youth Forum. One copy of the card is cut up to make counters similar to a Bingo game, while blocking out six squares randomly on cards that are given one each to the young people. The young people are then asked what they think that the terms mean and then explain and discuss what each is. It is reported to have been popular. The winner receives a youth festival T-shirt for completing their Bingo card first. A copy of a Bingo Card is attached at Appendix E.

3.3.1.2.4 As an example from another Local Authority, attached at Appendix F is the glossary of terms contained in the Leicestershire Partnership's Community Engagement and Communication Strategy. This Strategy has been commended as an example of best practice.

## 3.4 Looking at Best Practice and other Local Authorities

### 3.4.1 Local Authorities

3.4.1.1 Desktop research was carried out with a number of Local Authorities and other organisations regarding their community engagement processes

3.4.1.2 The following Local Authorities were contacted:

- Liverpool City Council
- Portsmouth City Council
- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
- Southampton City Council
- Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
- Vale Royal Borough Council

- Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
- Salford City Council
- Newcastle City Council

3.4.1.3 Other information was obtained via the Internet and the Audit Commission's website.

#### 3.4.1.4 **Involve**

3.4.1.5 The organisation, Involve, has been commissioned to create a web-based resource of information on community engagement, but as yet this is not published. Once published this could be a useful tool for Local Authorities when carrying out consultation. The website for Involve is [www.involve.org](http://www.involve.org).

Key Points:-

#### 3.4.1.6 **Liverpool City Council**

Liverpool City Council has developed a Consultation Strategy that guides service managers when consulting with their service users, and includes guidance on how to reach seldom heard groups. The Council has a link with the Liverpool Community Network (LCN) who supports it reaching these Groups. LCN is part of the local CVS and it has several network groups set up to represent various Groups, including disabled people, Black, Minority and Ethnic Groups (BME), Lesbians, Bi Sexual and Gay people (LGB), young people and faith groups etc. It has a market research team who conducts some of the consultation exercises but the Council also engages with consultants for some pieces of consultation.

The Council is currently at level 2 (the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) equality Mark Certificate) for its Equality Standard for Local Government its community engagement and is working towards level 3.

#### 3.4.1.7 **Portsmouth City Council**

Together We Can is a Government Campaign to bring Government and people closer together, encouraging public bodies to do more to enable people to influence local decisions. It is led by Communities and Local Government and is closely linked to the Local Government White Paper's aim of giving local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives.

Together We Can commends Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit as award winning. It is designed for Local Authority practitioners working in the Portsmouth area but the high quality of the guide means that it can be easily adapted to any type of Local Authority consultation.

It is reported that the document is an accessibly written and concise guide to undertaking successfully community consultation, and seeks to practically

address potential pitfalls by providing clear, thorough advice and checklists for practitioners. The checklists are especially useful for staff that are new to consultation.

A copy of Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit is attached at Appendix F.

#### **3.4.1.8 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC)**

RMBC is amongst the first group of Local Authorities nationally to be awarded the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) Equality Mark Certificate for achieving level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. The Council uses many and varied methods of consulting and involving communities. The Council's Consultation and Community Involvement Strategy was highlighted as good practice by the auditors who validated its level 3 achievement.

RMBC reports that it has a good working relationship with an umbrella organisation that represents many BME Organisations in Rotherham. Through its support it was able to carry out specific consultations for example with BME women, elders, young people, Pakistani, Kashmiri, Yemeni communities. Consultants were not employed; the work was undertaken entirely in-house.

#### **3.4.1.9 Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (KMBC)**

KMBC has been awarded three stars for its Neighbourhood Management Process.

The website for the Neighbourhood Partnership working is very comprehensive.

The Council's Community Area Forums have now been replaced by new arrangements, which came into force following the Council's Annual General Meeting in May 2005.

The new approach improves consultation, action planning and delivery at local level.

It needs to make sure that its local neighbourhoods and communities benefit from this by:-

- having a more focussed Partnership approach at local level
- giving local communities a clear role
- ensuring services are more effectively targeted
- producing real and lasting improvements
- strengthening local accountability

Regular press releases are issued in relation to the neighbourhood partnership meetings.

## 4. Conclusions

After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn:

- 4.1 The Task and Finish Group recognises that the web-based resource of information on community engagement that is being produced by Involve, that has yet to be published, could be a useful tool for the Authority when carrying out consultation.
- 4.2 The Task and Finish Group realises the need for reports to Full Council, Cabinet and other Council meetings to contain an implications paragraph on Community Engagement and Consultation. There is a need for a gatekeeper to ensure that all reports contain these details.
- 4.3 The Council has spent resources on the development of numerous Strategies for Community Engagement and none have been fully resourced or implemented. The Borough's Strategy for Communications and Consultations which is published on the Council's Intranet site has not been approved.
- 4.4 Northampton Borough Council does not have a Consultation Toolkit. Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit has been recognised as an example of best practice and would provide a useful template for a Consultation Toolkit for the borough.
- 4.5 It is acknowledged that Overview and Scrutiny has a rigorous monitoring process and the Portfolio Holder is requested to provide a progress report six months after the report has been accepted by Cabinet and further monitoring is undertaken until all recommendations have been implemented. However, the Task and Finish Group feels that it needs to be emphasised that all Overview and Scrutiny Review reports be enacted and the accepted recommendations monitored.
- 4.6 There is a need to find ways to encourage citizens to speak at public council meetings. The Task and Finish Group challenges the culture and the Council's Constitution in relation to public speaking and how it impacts on the Council's image.
- 4.7 The Council appears to be in defensive mode and often buries bad news stories rather than publish them. It is acceptable for the Council to report that as an authority it has failed and to accept and acknowledge any mistakes made.
- 4.8 A lot of citizens have expressed concern at the loss of Area Partnerships and there is a need to demonstrate that momentum has not been lost; for example Neighbourhood Managed Area meetings should be held quarterly.
- 4.9 Amongst all options that should be considered to improve public consultation consideration should be given to both internal and external support for the consultation process including examining all forms of communication, for example, pre recorded telephone calls, texts.

- 4.10 The Task and Finish Group feels that it needs to be recognised that the Neighbourhood boundaries are not fixed and may need to be reviewed once sufficient evidence for change is established. These boundaries may change and evolve.
- 4.11 The Task and Finish Group recognises the important part that Neighbourhood Partnerships both managed (with officer support) and unmanaged (self run) will continue to play in the Council's Community Engagement Strategy. There is a need for each area (managed and unmanaged) to have its own Communication/Participation Plan that is resourced by the Council. Feedback mechanisms need to include regular reports to the relevant Council departments, and whilst managed areas have coordinators in place the Council needs to ensure that all areas, managed and unmanaged, have support to enable the development and implementation of a Community Engagement Strategy and the plans within each co-ordinated area.
- 4.12 The Task and Finish Group suggested that, where the Council is aware of any overlap of duties between those of a Neighbourhood Partnership, and those of a Parish Council, in areas where there is an active Parish Council which would prefer not to see a Neighbourhood Partnership within their area; as long as the Parish Council signs up to and complies with the Council's Protocol, for example by hosting public meetings, the Council should state that the Parish Council will undertake the function and role of the Neighbourhood Partnership. This may necessitate, after consultation, a change to Neighbourhood boundaries as in 4.10 above.
- 4.13 In order for the Council to carry out effective consultations there is a need for a budget specific for consultation exercises.
- 4.14 Comment was made from some of the expert witnesses that the Council needs to do more to engage with hard to reach groups.



## 5. Recommendations

The Task and Finish Group requests that all of the recommendations detailed below are implemented in order that the improvements that this Task and Finish Group seeks can be delivered:

- 5.1 That reports to all Committees contain an implications paragraph on Community Engagement and Consultation. Meetings Services should act as the gatekeeper to ensure that all reports contain these details and reject any reports that do not contain the relevant information.
- 5.2 That, once published, the web-based resource of information on community engagement that is being produced by the organisation 'Involve', be used by all departments when carrying out consultation.
- 5.3 That a Strategy for Community Engagement be devised which reflects organisational priorities and increased partnership working in accordance with the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) devolved structures. It should be recognised that this is an evolving area.
- 5.4 That as Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit has been recognised as an example of best practice (Copy attached at Appendix F) this document be considered as a template for a Consultation Toolkit for borough Council staff.
- 5.5 That for the public to be more trusting of the Council, it has to be open and transparent in reporting all of its activities. All public information should therefore be widely available and published.
- 5.6 That the mechanisms for receiving public feedback be examined and a policy produced. The mechanisms for reporting back from Neighbourhood Management need to ensure that information received is reported to the relevant Council departments and Councillors.
- 5.7 That the philosophy of Neighbourhood Management is extended across the whole town. Each area should have its own Communication/Participation Plan that is resourced by the Council. Within this there should be a feedback mechanism.
- 5.8 That Neighbourhood Partnerships be fully resourced in order that their role can be enhanced and that they form part of each area's plan (as described in recommendation 5.7) should this be appropriate for that area.
- 5.9 That Parish Councils be contacted and provided with details of the plans for Neighbourhood Management. It should be stated that where the Council is aware of any overlap of duties and in that area there is an active Parish Council that the Parish Council complies, for example by hosting public meetings. The Council would not wish to be involved but it would need to ensure that Parish Councils sign up to its Protocol if a particular Parish Council, after public consultation, did not want a Neighbourhood Partnership within their area. This will form part of the area's plan as described in recommendation 5.7.

- 5.10 That it be recognised that the Neighbourhood boundaries are not fixed and may need to be reviewed once sufficient evidence for change is established.
- 5.11 That the Council recognises that in order to consult with hard to reach groups it will have to consider how best to inform those in the community whose contact with the Council is minimal. These will include passive members of the community who have limited social engagement, members of the community for whom English is not their first language and members of the community who take a disinterest in the administration of Local Government. In order to reach these groups the Council should consider how to ensure that information written in clear, concise language can be delivered beyond people's front doors and/or is communicated to them via the social networks they are engaged in.
- 5.12 That a consultation budget be implemented. Analysis should take place to ascertain the amount of resource required.
- 5.13 That consideration be given to internal and external mediums for the consultation process to ensure that cost effective and modern forms of communication are considered.

## **Appendices**

# **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

### **1. Purpose/Objectives of the Review**

- To review the Council's engagement activities, including Neighbourhood Management.
- To review how community engagement could be improved and what Groups the Council should be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new and difficult to reach communities who are not currently represented.

### **2. Outcomes Required**

- To recommend mechanisms, practice and evaluation that enables all local people and Community Groups to have a voice.
- To produce an outline and recommend the preparation of a Community Engagement Strategy.
- To recommend methods to manage the information collected as a result of the improvement in engagement, in order that it informs policy-making, service delivery and design.

### **3. Information Required**

- An analysis of the Council's current method of engagement, including successes and failures of engaging with the community.
- A synopsis of all information currently available.
- Verbal evidence from employees, Borough and County Councillors.
- Written evidence from community organisations and groups.
- Best practice Councils.

### **4. Format of Information**

- Officer reports/presentations
- Maps showing how areas are currently geographically split
- Baseline data
- Best practice external to Northampton
- Witness interviews/evidence
- Portfolio Holder evidence

### **5. Methods Used to Gather Information**

- Minutes of the meetings

- Desktop research
- Examples of best practice
- Witness Interviews/evidence: -
  - Community and Councillor Co-Chairs of the Community Forums
  - Residents' Associations
  - Parish Councils
  - Chair of Northampton Tenants and Council Together (NTACT)
  - Mrs B Mennell, member of NTACT
  - Faith Leaders
  - Community Leaders
  - NBC and NCC Councillors
  - T Hall, Corporate Manager, NBC
  - L Ambrose, Area Partnerships and Forums Co-Ordinator, NBC
  - P Gadhia, NCC
  - J Tinker, Strategic Neighbourhood Manager, NCC

## **6. Co-Options to the Review Committee**

None for this review. However all Task and Finish Groups should consider the provision of an external advisor.

## **7. Evidence gathering Timetable**

July – September 2007

30 July	Scoping the review
13 and 23 August	Evidence gathering
4 September	Finalise Chair's report

## **8. Responsible Officers**

Lead Officers	Simone Wade
Co-ordinator	Tracy Tiff

## **9. Resources and Budget**

Simone Wade, Policy and Governance Manager, and Thomas Hall, Corporate Manager, to provide support and advice.

## **10 Final report presented by:**

Completed by September 2007. Presented by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 and then to Cabinet.

## **11 Monitoring procedure:**

To review the impact of the report after six months (March 2008).

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Response from Chris Swinn. Vice Chair N-TACT

The Science of Citizenship:

*"In making governance work, you have got to get the physics right – the structures – but you've also got to deal with the chemistry, the emotions involved.*

The Community at large has been disempowered, disenfranchised and disengaged from the paramount and peak decision-making body the Full Council

Community Engagement is about involving the Citizens in decision-making.

First Things First - Change the Council Constitution back to what the Citizens had before September 2006. Allow Public to Address any Agenda Item at Full Council Meetings and return the Power to People to have their say, before it's too late.

Is this Modern 21<sup>st</sup> Century Participatory Democracy?

**Q1) How well do you think the Council consults with you? Please give examples.**

There has been inconsistency from consultation to consultation due to the obvious lack of strategy, protocols and rules of engagement.

I.e. The Ground Rules - The Do's and Don'ts

**Good Consultations: 3 Stars**

- 1) Public Engagement and Communication Task & Finish Group (Simple the Best – Bench Mark
- 2) Budget Consultation 2004 / 2006
- 3) Vision 2035
- 4) Budget Consultation 2006 / 2007

**Fair Consultations: 2 Stars**

- 1) Budget Consultation 2005 / 2006
- 2) Neighbourhood Management Training, Workshop and information Sessions at the Guildhall and Community Forums and Area Partnerships

**Bad / Poor Consultations: 1 Star**

- 1) Housing Options Appraisal 2004 / 2005
- 2) Castle Ward CASPAR 3 + Neighbourhood Management 2005 to present day
- 3) Housing Strategy 2006 to 2011
- 4) BME Housing Strategy

**No Consultation: Nul Point / Zero Star**

- 1) Housing Allocation Policy Interim Changes
- 2) Neighbourhood Partnerships

**Q2) Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why.**

**No! Officers and Councillors need to get out about more and Listen, Learn, Talk to and Build Trust and Confidence with the Customers, the Citizens of our Great City**

- 1) Consultations tend to be Guildhall centred with same old familiar faces
- 2) We have four District Shopping Centres in Duston, Kingsthorpe, Mereway and Weston Flavell so use them
- 3) Community Centres and Community Rooms are under utilised, so use them.
- 4) Community Notice Boards Install them and then use them
- 5) Communicate – Communicate – Communicate Use the Media Press, Free Press, Radio and TV - All Publicity is good even when its bad – Promote Citizenry and the Council – Attract Citizens and Community Champions - Turn Weaknesses into Strengths and Threats into Opportunities

**Q3) How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?**

- 1) Develop and Implement, the NBC Community Engagement, Citizens Participation, Communication and Consultation Strategy and Action Plan then Monitor and Review it Quarterly

- 2) Be Consistent, Open, Transparent and Honest at all Times
- 3) Councillors as Paramount Community Leaders need to hold regular rotating weekly Surgeries and Walkabouts with Residents.
- 4) Proactively Develop New Residents Associations, Tenants Groups and Community Groups.
- 5) Officers to facilitate, Councillors to lead and Citizens to participate
- 6) Always summarise plenary sessions, report back to meeting, and wash up meeting and then feedback outputs and outcomes to attendees, post to the NBC Website and issue a Press Release to all Media outlets

**Q4) Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Community Groups?  
If not, please give details why.**

**1) Neighbourhood Management Area (NMA) Boards**

Certainly not! They appear to be officer dominated feudal fiefdoms of self appointed, selected and un-elected members of certain but not all Resident Associations that have no democratic mandate that meet in secret in closed meetings to which the residents at large are not invited.

So much for Community Empowerment and Citizen Participation

**Solution: Directly Elect Resident Representatives every four years to represent suburbs or precincts in the Ward or NMA.**

Invite all residents at large in the NMA. Hold all monthly NMA meetings in Public  
See Bristol's 'Community at Heart' @ <http://www.ndcbristol.co.uk/>

**2) Neighbourhood Partnership (Forums)**

Whilst they open to all citizens most do not know where and when they meet, so nobody turns up other than Officers and Councillors who always out number those they are suppose to be serving. Only attended by those in the Know, and the great and the good and informed.

**Solution: Distribute Flyers to promote, attract and actually invite all local residents**

**Q5) In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?**

**1) Hold a Community Engagement Summit at the Guildhall during Local Democracy Week - Invite the leaders of all Residents Associations, Community, National, Ethnic, Ecumenical, Religious and Faith Groups**

**2) Locate and Visit all the meetings of all Community Groups**

**Q6) Any additional information that you feel would inform the review.**

**Establish New Parish or Community Councils in every Ward incorporating the Neighbourhood Management Areas and Partnerships and all they deliver.**

**“Participation is the key to Community Harmony”**



①

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP.

- How well do you think the Council consults with you?  
Please give examples.

Not very well, I feel the Council should consult more widely with Partners and other groups.

- Do you think all community groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why.

No, because they don't feel they are being listened to or consulted to at times.

- How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?

By consulting more widely disabled groups and disabled people and also all other borough Council user groups.

- Do you feel that the Neighbourhood management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all groups? if not, please give details why.

Not really, since the change I think they feel excluded and I also think they feel left out of the process, and they shouldn't. All people should be included and consulted if possible.

- In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently

(3)

represented?

Consulted groups not being consulted already should still consult the ones they do. They should aim to consult

③

represented?

consulted groups not being  
consulted already should still  
consult the ones they do. They  
should also consult new groups  
so that nobody feels left out or  
not consulted.

## Appendix B

I would like to make the following input to the community engagement task and finish group.

The Council's current community engagement practices make it relatively easy for highly motivated and experienced people to engage with the council, but difficult for those who are less informed or less motivated. We have forums and area structures which play an important role, but with limited numbers of largely 'self selecting' people. This will always be a problem, but we should not allow it to lead us to move away from area partnerships and forums.

I sit on the Kingsthorpe/St. Davids/Boughton Green neighbourhood managed area as a Borough Councillor and I attend the Kingsley/Parklands area partnership as a County Councillor, although NCC has formally withdrawn. The two tier structure of neighbourhood engagement that we now have is causing problems. Area partnerships in the managed areas have ceased to exist, and their replacement is unclear. In the non-managed areas there is a feeling of resentment and uncertainty, coupled with anger at the lack of engagement of the County Council.

The Kingsley and Parklands area partnership consists of two wards that do not relate to each other at all well. We alternate the meetings between the two, the attendance generally reflects the venue for the particular meeting, but the way it operates fails to recognise that Parklands ward contains 3 very distinct communities (only one of which is represented by the very effective Parklands residents association). Kingsley is a number of overlapping and inter-related communities, with no single large residents association but a number of smaller groups representing streets and vocal individuals who play an important role in their street.

Neighbourhood managed areas have been chosen on the basis of pockets of deprivation and then expanded to create a critical mass population. I estimate the area of deprivation in St. Davids comprises less than 20% of that neighbourhood managed area, and a similar figure may apply in Eastfield/Headlands. So far, we have lost the level of engagement that we did have with residents in Kingsthorpe and Boughton Green, and we need to put that right quickly. We need to be able to move on with neighbourhood management, when we have got it right, to cover the whole town.

Residents associations vary widely in size and activity around the town, from focussing on one or two streets to a large estate. We need to consider how we engage with people outside of residents associations and ensure that we have a geographical spread of representation at area meetings.

Could we consider a 'street warden' idea, in which we invite people to come forward as a volunteer warden for their street, to engage with the neighbourhood warden and community safety team and be invited to attend area partnerships. If we have two people come forward from a street, we invite them to be the nucleus of a residents group. These people are still self selecting, but they can provide us with the 'eyes and ears' we need and give them a role and status to motivate their continued involvement. It extends the idea of neighbourhood watch beyond policing to community engagement on a wider level and provides a line of communication back to all residents. The increased focus of activity neighbourhood management is creating in areas of deprivation can be used to promote the street warden idea, thus possibly increasing the participation of some hard to reach groups at the same time. The promotion of the idea will be seen as a positive step by NBC and our partners to improve our community engagement. They could be consultees on policy and budget proposals as well as on particular issues affecting their street, and they could be supported and encouraged to develop a network of contacts that may become a more formal residents association.

The idea needs more thought and planning, but the task and finish group might like to consider it. In many streets the individuals are already there, just not recognised and properly engaged. You may also be able to think of a better title than 'street warden' for the kind of volunteer role I am proposing.

Richard Church

12th August 2007

Councillor Paul Varnserry  
Northampton Borough Council  
The Guildhall  
St Giles Square  
Northampton NN1 1WG

Dear Cllr Varnserry,

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

I thank you for your letter and enclosures dated 6th August 2007 regarding the above. I am responding as former Chair of both Ecton Brook Residents' Association, which is currently dormant, and of the Northampton Federation of Residents' Associations, of which I remain an honorary life member.

In response to your core questions, I would make the following comments:

1. As an individual, I find the Council consult fairly well on major issues, e.g. proposed change of landlords in the Social Housing Section.

2. I do not think that all Community groups are adequately consulted, e.g. Community Groups do not receive planning applications for their area as a matter of course on such vital issues such as proposed housing developments, or change of use of land. I realise planning applications can be viewed on request but, unless one is aware of proposed changes, it can be too late to make observations/objections on specific applications.

3. Consultation, in itself, is insufficient. Residents must have feedback on their observations and feel that their voices are being heard and considered. I have always been a strong advocate for having a Residents' Liaison Officer, as was first introduced by the former Northampton Development Corporation in the late 1960s, and continued for a time by the Borough Council after the winding-up of the NDC. This ensured a strong link between the Residents' Groups and the Local Authority, thus ensuring prompt and adequate answers to potential problems identified and raised.

It is noted that local Councillors do attend Residents' Association meetings, but the existence of a Liaison Officer would give more ready access to officers and would allow more mobility, with common problems in different areas being readily identified.

In the case of Area Partnerships, for example, perhaps a revolving venue could be considered, and also different times for meetings to be held, to enable more representatives of the community to attend and participate, and also the frequency of

such meetings could be considered to ensure continuity in work

being undertaken. I realise that Councillors might find this difficult, but a Residents' Liaison Officer would have this as a part of their job description.

4. From what I know of Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership, these work very well, with all kinds of groups, e.g. local authorities, police and resident groups, working together. It is always important to leave a working group in place after the project is concluded in order to maintain and sustain the work that has been carried out

5. I notice from the WITNESS INTERVIEWS/EVIDENCE , in the Methods Used to Gather Information listing that there is no inclusion of the NORTHAMPTON FEDERATION OF RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS. This organisation has a very good working relationship with the Borough Council dating back to 1980. The Federations aim is to embrace all Community Groups within the borough, enabling them to be part of the decision making processes which affect their lives. Not all groups wish to be members of the Federation, but it is hoped that membership will be improved as it is proposed that in order to access funding a group must be a member of the Federation.

Due to the changes which have taken place within the Borough Council during the past twelve months, resident representation has failed to continue on various groups, e.g. Scrutiny Committees and Strategic Partnerships.

Resident representation is the essential key to making the residents of Northampton secure in the knowledge that their voice is being heard and listened to.

Yours sincerely,



Doreen McKintosh (Mrs)

### **Response to the Community Engagement Task and Finish Group's core questions**

#### **From Margaret Pritchard, Secretary, Northampton Federation of Residents' Association**

1. Budget consultation but little else. Often short notice for feed back as most groups only meet once a month. Many RAs have newsletters which could include consultation questionnaires.

Many people feel happier talking to someone at their meeting rather than coming to a large public meeting at the Guildhall. Area Partnerships used to provide this facility, but NM too big & meetings are not open to the general public.

2. Northampton Federation of R A could be used better e.g. info sent out in advance then presentation & feedback given at a meeting.

3. NM has not been adequately explained to most groups, so people were not aware of the importance of sending Reps to the first meeting; This meant that only those who attended were able to join the board e.g. in Lumbertubs/ Thorplands only 2 RA are represented.

4. More should be done to enable new RA to start up e.g. an automatic grant for set up costs & help with constitution, training for officers of the group etc. This would require a development officer post to empower local people.

5. Ra's are hampered by lack of funds as applying for enabling grant is longwinded & time consuming. They should be regarded as the grass roots for consultation & engagement & should not have to spend a lot of time fundraising just to keep going.

These are my own views, having started Brookside Residents' Council nine years ago & being a member of NFRA.

Margaret.

## **Community engagement task and finish group Written Evidence form Northampton Volunteering Centre**

Northampton Volunteering Centre is the Local Infrastructure Organisation (LIO) providing support services to frontline voluntary and community groups. Part of this role is to provide advocacy on behalf of the sector and individual organisations and to provide a route for effective communication and consultation with the sector.

Northampton Volunteering Centre would like to submit the following evidence based on our work with voluntary and community groups. We have also consulted with the Steering Group of the Northampton Voluntary and Community Sector Forum. The Forum has a membership of 160 voluntary and community sector organisations and the Steering group is elected from this membership to direct the Forum's work. The Forum provides a route for the local voluntary sector to have a voice, by feeding in to consultation and development plans and electing sector representatives. It is a communications and engagement channel between the voluntary and statutory sectors.

### **1 How well do you think the Council consults with you? Please give examples.**

NBC doesn't consult with its constituencies well. Firstly people are not well informed, often relying on the local media for information, which is skewed or incorrect.

NBC has used the mechanism of the Northampton Voluntary and Community Sector Forum to consult with voluntary and community organisations however consultation has often been late and comes at the end of the process of policy formation rather than as a route to the actual formulation of policy. Therefore the ability of voluntary and community organisations to input is limited. The Forum's involvement in consultation also relies on a pro-active approach by the worker who supports the Forum both to identify consultations, which the Borough is undertaking and to press for the voluntary sector to be included as consultees.

The national Compact between the voluntary and public sectors has a code of practice relating to consultation and policy appraisal (see [www.compact.org.uk](http://www.compact.org.uk) publications, a copy is attached). This states that there should be a minimum 12 week period for written consultations as well as providing a lot of other guidance about how to approach consultation. NBC does not always follow the Compact. There have been short notice consultations, both written and where consultations events have been held, for example the annual budget consultations. This makes it extremely difficult to get the information to possible consultees effectively and much less likely that people can participate. The short time frames have at times seemed to be indicative of a lack of a proper planned approach to consultation. NBC lacks a consultation strategy to ensure timely and effective consultation



instead consultation seems to be run on an ad hoc basis, which can lead to duplication and ineffective methods.

The voluntary sector does not feel that there will be any action as a result of its input to consultation. Eg the ongoing consultation about funding for voluntary and community groups which has been taking place for 2/3 years

### **NBC Forums**

These appear to exist in something of a vacuum. Those attending bring no mandate in most cases and therefore represent a collection of individual views. This is in itself not wrong, but does not seem the most effective way of consulting either on the basis of cost or of reach.

## **2 Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why?**

Clearly all community groups are not consulted adequately. There does not appear to be any process for maintaining contact with existing groups or tracking the development of new groups.

As the Local Infrastructure Organisation for Northampton, NVC has contact with many community groups especially new and emerging groups and many are members of the Northampton Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Forum, which is co-ordinated through NVC and provides a voice for the VCS and a mechanism for consultation and elected representation. However, during a mapping exercise of community groups in Northampton in the late summer of 2006, NVC discovered new groups, proving that a proactive approach is necessary in engaging with such groups.

NBC needs to adopt a range of different consultation and engagement methods to reach members of the community and allow longer for consultation. NBC should utilise existing pathways such as the Northampton Voluntary and Community Sector Forum and fully recognise that the voluntary sector can be a route to reaching communities even if their work covers a larger geographic area because they do grass routes work. Further investment in the Forum could facilitate the development of its reach into community groups.

There has been no dedicated long-term resource applied to support the development or capacity of residents associations and these are therefore patchy and inconsistent in their ability to engage. They are also often not representative of the residents of their local area. NVC as the Northampton infrastructure organisation could provide more in depth support if we had further funding.

There are communities of geography and there are community of interest.

There is a difference between consultation directly with residents and consultation with community groups.

### **3 How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?**

- It could be more effective/efficient to use existing mechanisms, rather than duplicate. NBC should commission consultation through other VCS organisations, which have a close association with particular groups of people or organisations, such as disabled people. These organisations are much more in tune with their members or users and understand the best ways to elicit their views.
- If consulting with community groups then the voluntary sector's own mechanism – the Northampton Voluntary and community Sector Forum could be commissioned to undertake this role more effectively.
- Fully adopt the Compact Code on Consultation and Policy Appraisal including the minimum timescales for consultation and commitment to making consultation a meaningful process
- There must be a more planned approach – a calendar of consultations should be set up linked to key points in the council year eg budget setting
- Plan and consult early – not after all the ideas have been formulated
- Clarity of roles – which NBC officers are involved in consultation and engagement and who does what
- NBC needs to develop its skills in running consultations so that the best methods are employed. For example some consultation questions have clearly not been written by someone with a research background – this will impact on the quality of the data gathered and probably also on the likelihood of response.
- Be flexible and sensitive to the needs of those you wish to consult – think about how to reach all of the intended target audience, and take account positively of the specific needs and interests
- NBC should think about the future of the Council Forums – are these the most inclusive and cost effective approach, could they be reformatted creating a broader equalities forum and what external interest groupings coming together in another context could be utilised instead.
- Explain where decisions have already been made – make clear what you can change and what you can't.

- Provide feedback on the outcomes of consultation and commit to actually taking on board what people say and making at least some changes as a result
- NBC needs to think about ongoing engagement as well as consultation. There should be ongoing dialogue. Ongoing dialogue can help improve the development and delivery of programmes based on partnership, where improved mutual understanding can enhance joint working and policy outcomes. One route for this is through the Voluntary and Community Sector Forum but other routes should be created in communities so that issues can be raised and the information retained and utilised and discussions about solutions can be more ongoing

#### **4. Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Groups? If not, please give details why.**

It will be difficult to generate engagement at this micro neighbourhood level and this will rely on community development activity to help stimulate involvement.

The area partnerships suffered in effectiveness when the county council withdrew from them meaning the residents concerns about issue of relevance to them could not be answered when related to NCC services.

There should be greater links between the Neighbourhood approach and the wider voluntary and community sector as there is a danger that the Neighbourhood approach will be run very separately. For example Neighbourhood managers and co-ordinators have different experience but need to receive an induction about the Northampton vcs and to promote a linked up approach to taking the issues experienced by communities and their needs.

#### **5. In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?**

NBC should use VCS pathways as a route in and commission additional pieces of work rather than attempting to be aware of all voluntary and community groups itself.

NBC should think about its methods for reaching communities of interest and communities of geography.

NVC can provide a link to small and emerging groups as part of our role is to help people thinking of starting a new voluntary/community group.

Use established vcs organisations and their links with the localities and communities of interest

### **6. Any additional information that you feel would inform the review**

Consultation should be a strategic mechanism not a reactive mechanism. There should be ongoing information gathering.

In the VCS service user involvement happens all the time and therefore service users feel value and make a contribution to their own futures.

Consultation and community engagement is also linked to representation for example representation on the LSP. There is no longer a clear route for vcs involvement in the LSP.

## PARKLANDS RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

CHAIRMAN MR. B. COOPER 01604 452710  
VICE CHAIRMAN MR. S. HEGARTY 01604 642902  
SECRETARY MRS. W. COOPER 01604 452710  
TREASURER MRS. B. LEE 01604 646981  
TREASURER MRS. J. WINSTANLEY 01604 648888  
E-MAIL [briwen.cooper@ntlworld.com](mailto:briwen.cooper@ntlworld.com)

14TH AUGUST 2007

### OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK & FINISH GROUP

DEAR TRACY,

TO TRY AND ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS

QU.1. I DO NOT THINK THE COUNCIL CONSULTS WITH US AS A GROUP VERY WELL. A LOT OF TIMES WE HEAR OR READ IN THE PAPER WHAT IS GOING ON. IT IS VERY RARE THAT WE HAVE ANY CORRESPONDENCE TO OUR RESIDENTS AFS.

QU.2. I CANNOT SPEAK FOR OTHER GROUPS BUT I DO NOT THINK THAT WE AS A GROUP ARE NOT ADEQUATELY CONSULTED.

QU.3 NOTIFY ALL GROUPS THAT ARE REGISTERED WITH THE COUNCIL

QU.4. NEIGHBOURHOOD PARTNERSHIPS IN MY OWN OPINION DO NOT WORK. IN THE YEARS I HAVE BEEN ATTENDING THE MEETINGS WE SEEM TO GO OVER THE SAME GROUND AND VERY LITTLE IS ACHIEVED. AT THE PRESENT MOMENT IT HAS BEEN DECIDED THAT THE MEETINGS ARE ATTENDED BY ALL AGENCIES INCLUDING THE COUNTY COUNCIL BUT THEY VERY RARELY APPEAR. I THINK IT IS A MECHANISM TO LET PEOPLE AIR THEIR VIEWS BUT NOTHING SEEMS TO GET DONE.

QU.5 AS I SAID EARLIER NOTIFY REGISTERED GROUPS. ANY NEW COMMUNITY SHOULD BE APPROACHED AND THEN THEY WOULD HAVE TO DECIDE IF THEY WANT TO BE REPRESENTED.

QU.6 OVER THE YEARS I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED WITH THE COUNCIL I HAVE FOUND THAT THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE COUNCIL AND MYSELF IS VERY POOR. IF YOU CAN GET THROUGH BY TELEPHONE YOU GET A VOICEMAIL MESSAGE AND MORE OFTEN THAN NOT YOU DO NOT GET A REPLY. ANOTHER EXPERIENCE IS:- IF THE PERSON YOU ARE DEALING WITH IS SICK OR ON LEAVE THERE ISN'T ANYONE TO TAKE A DECISION ETC. (VERY FRUSTRATING). THANK YOU  
B. Cooper  
BRIAN COOPER

### Overview & Scrutiny Community Engagement Task & Finish Group.

Tracy,

With regard to the information you sent out I have collected together the thoughts of some of the councillors from Billing Parish Council and I reproduce them below for your information.

**I recently attended a full Borough Council meeting, as an observer, to listen to the debate regarding Little Billing Village Green. The motion to adopt 'Village Green' status was defeated and the leader of the council, Cllr Woods stated several times that there was a need to consult with Billing Parish Council. After a week of no contact with either the clerk or myself I emailed Cllr Woods direct. I received a reply approximately 12 days later, maybe coincidentally at the point where the local press had become interested. I replied to Cllr Woods email and again over a week passes by with no response, not even an acknowledgement. (Steve Rockall, Chairman).**

I regularly attend relevant Area Partnership Meetings and CASPAR Meetings, which usually have a selection of local Councillors, and quite often Council employees in attendance. These are good forums, and enable members of the public to express their concerns with local issues, such as security, environmental concerns, unruly behaviour etcetera. I feel that these meetings are not publicised sufficiently, and more members of the general public should be notified of the existence of these meetings, and encouraged to attend. Perhaps details could be included with Council Tax demands?

The Councils record on consultation at most levels is at least poor. What the Council may believe they are doing and what the public's perception is of many consultations are often widely at variance. Partly due to the poor record of Government and Councils both in the consultation process and the response, the general public are often reluctant to engage in the consultation. Witness the public's poor level of response to consultations and the turn out at local elections when they consider they are not being heard or listened to. Also, depending on the subject matter, many of the respondents are from "extremist" groups and the outcome can be skewed by their views.

At more local level, when was the last time a council asked the residents of an area about cleanliness, maintenance of footpaths and roadways, waste disposal, recycling, certain developments and changes proposed to an area and other matters that ordinary people have views on but fail to be heard or listened to by their council executive and/or elected councillors.

Specific example: something that has reach the national newspapers recently, tree felling and pollarding in towns and cities. Residents are not at all pleased to see trees cut down at the whim of the local authority with no consultation and in many cases where there has been no attempt at remedial action to make trees safe or tend to disease. Northampton Borough and County Councils are both guilty.

Groups specially singled-out for communication should include Parish Councils, Residents' Associations, and Neighbourhood Watch Groups, as members of such organisations are in touch with any problems occurring in their communities, and also keep abreast of local opinion. Perhaps more help could be given to new communities

to form Residents' Associations, as these are usually excellent forums for local views and concerns.

As far as the Council itself is concerned, it has to be said that although there are many knowledgeable and efficient employees in this vast organisation, there is also a lot of dross. If you were directed to the right people and the right departments when making telephone enquiries it would be very helpful, as would an acknowledgement of correspondence let alone a reply which, in my experience, is about as likely as the development of hens' teeth. Higher standards of staff selection and training would clearly be the answer here.

**Quite often groups are only consulted when it suits the case or when there is an outcry regarding a particularly sensitive issue. There needs to be standards and processes in place to allow the community to be consulted on many more matters that affect the general and tax paying public with more openness and accountability not just for Councillors but also for the Executive. Many residents of Northampton are not happy with the money spent on failed senior appointments to the council's executive.**

I work for the County Council and I see it from the inside. They want to go into Call centres rather than have specific departments deal with enquiries. Most other organisations like insurance companies, banks and building societies etc. have already abandoned this idea but the County Council wants to introduce it. It will mean more incorrect and inaccurate information being given out to the public. Staff numbers have to be reduced considerably already and they are losing older experienced staff.

**If the councils do consult, extremist bodies do invariably skew the results. If anyone tries to engage the local council's often you are bounced around the depts. as no one seems to know who/which department is responsible. Remember how the Borough & County could not state who are responsible for various footpaths etc etc.**

**(Response to the third point raised) Simply by actually having the processes in place along with the courage and conviction to actually do it many cases. Why should the electorate not be encouraged to engage in their communities?**

**(And to the fourth point) There would appear to be an attempt to engage with interested parties but often the organisations that need to engage are often less than enthusiastic about the consultation. An example is the local Police force, who we accept are busy people, but can't always attend gatherings, often at short notice, because of other commitments. This can be perceived as lack of interest or a low priority but seen as much higher priority to local communities. Also, more specific to Councils, are the responses of some departments. When asked to engage in consultation it is often seen as something of an inconvenience and they lack the skills or enthusiasm to handle such events. If the council's arboreal specialists**

**were asked to discuss their work with a local community group, would they really know how to handle the situation?**

Hope this is of some use.

Steve Rockall  
Chairman



**Overview and Scrutiny**

**Community Engagement Task and Finish Group**

**23 August 2007**

**Response to the Group's core questions from County Councillor Alan Hills**

My response to the questions are as follows !

1-The Council does consult with community groups, particularly in the neighbourhood renewal role. Overall a more hands on approach is needed at grass roots level.

2-Some very minor groups feel left out and therefore do not respond.

3-The mechanism could be improved by direct contact and visits to their organisation, events and meetings etc, then regular contact must be maintained, they have to feel that their needs and views are valued.

4-See all above comments.

5-It is essential council should be engaging with all community groups, particularly Residents and Tenants Associations also refer to comments in item 3.

Alan Hills

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

#### Response from Councillor Jean Hawkins

- How well do you think the Council consults and engages with Community Groups? Please give examples.
- **In my experience in Eastfield ward consultation appears to be a token activity**
- **The problem would be in having a full and representative contact list e.g. a very limited number of people attended the area partnership open meetings – how was information about these disseminated? Was there full use of all media e.g. how can the Council assume that the people chosen as contacts do in fact report back to the wider community Residents Associations similarly involve a small sample of the eard – typical mm attendance at both Eastfield RA and Lakeview RA would be 20 - 30 or 40 might attend if there is an issue**
- **Summary I accept that the Council has attempted a fair consultation process e.g. for the Budget setting but this has reached only a very small proportion of residents**
- Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why. **NO In Eastfield ward there a number of active groups, small in number and changing in composition e.g. Eastfield outreach this group is seen by others as outside the established mainstream but its members have valid concerns and make a positive contribution to the community AND WANT TO HAVE A VOICE**
- How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved? **Major publicity drive re consultation all stops pulled out e.g. like advertising for the Balloon festival**
- Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Community Groups? If not, please give details why. **This scheme is in embryo it is untried and untested yet because of its newness BUT I see a major problem in lack of common model between the different NMs In Eastfield it was thought that the sheer number of members on committees would make meetings unwieldy this decision clearly impedes full democratic involvement**
- **Once open consultation meetings are held in Eastfield there will be a fuller opportunity – but this will depend**

**on constituent groups being informed e.g. churches  
small local clubs (allotment group type I have in mind)**

- In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?  
**This repeats a question above all groups and individuals should be invited to participate some will attend meetings others may use a web site others prefer questionnaires Libraries GP surgeries stall in main shopping malls stalls at any/all major NBC events for consultation/feed back see Milton Keynes for how to do this shopping centre has excellent information and contact stall**
- Any additional information that you feel would inform the review.

**I have had some close involvement with the set up of the Eastfield NM-  
would be willing to give verbal evidence about issues facing public  
consultation but think Brian Markham as Chair may have given a  
thorough report already**

## Response to the Community Engagement Task and Finish Group's Core Questions

### From

Glynis Bliss  
County Director  
Victim Support Northamptonshire

Further to the letter of 6 August, received today, here is my feedback as requested (if I don't do these things straight away I discover them 3 months later!):

Q: Would a pack signposting to other funding streams be useful:

Response:

Any information about other and additional forms of funding is useful, but by the time the funding process has taken place and decisions made, it is often too late to apply elsewhere, both in terms of accessing funding streams and also re budget setting and determining the future of affected posts.

What would be helpful is constructive information about how the decision was made not to fund - what criteria the applicant didn't reach, feedback about the construction and content of the application.

Q: Is the current process of distributing funding fair and equitable contributing to the Council's priorities:

Response:

Compared with other funding processes it does seem to be fair, however, some other processes use scoring systems that are easily understood and feedback can be given easily about where applications didn't meet the criteria or scored less highly than others. We haven't always had good (or any real) feedback about decisions; sometimes several versions about decisions have been given. I'm not sure how open to the public/applicants the committee meetings are or how well advertised, but it would be helpful and constructive to have open meetings where officers present their recommendations and decisions are made. This would give real transparency.

Q: Suggest ways in which the Council can support the voluntary sector infrastructure:

Q: How could the Council support organisations awarded grants, including monitoring and evaluation:

Q: Any other information:

Response:

I am aware of the support given through NCompass, but I don't get much information about how NCompass is working or about developments. Probably there is a newsletter of sorts, but I don't get it, whereas I used to get a lot of info from the CVS.

The council could give practical support such as opening up its own training more at reduced cost, particularly in relation to management, which the volyry sector often struggles to resource. Also offer access to its own basic IT/H&S/etc training at free or reduced cost and offer access to reduced cost hardware such as IT if the Council has bulk contracts.

It might be helpful, for the Council to nominate individual Councillors to 'sponsor' a voluntary group, whether funded or not, so as to ensure a spread of knowledge about the voluntary sector and individual issues and successes. This would need commitment from Councillors as, where it happens in other areas, often the Councillor contact/attendance either doesn't happen or drops off.

## Appendix B

The bidding process for LAA/CDRP funding should become more open and transparent so that it is not seen as a restricted pot for the usual few statutory agencies.

## Appendix B

in response to your questionnaire on Community Engagement:

1. The council consults the Partnership on matters relating to Community Safety and Crime with the context of the Partnership itself. The council **one of the three** Lead partners , with the County and the Police. The partnership **has** itself limited direct engagement with its communities.

2. In the **area** of Community Safety , the Council struggles to reach Hard to reach groups and new emerging communities. We have little evidence of engagement with these communities and little collection of data that enables the 'real picture' to be obtained. Attempts at regular contact with community groups should be evidenced. Groups consulted should include the 'geographic' as well as the 'special interest'. **Since the review of Area Partnerships, many of which has been disbanded and the replacement process not yet finalised, there does not seem to be a regular process by which local communities can voice there concerns to the council.**

3. **As mentioned following the review of area partnerships, we are no longer fully** aware of the mechanism used. However, local groups are likely to complain about time and location of meetings, doubt as to whether they are really listened to and belief in the fact they they are consulted as a matter of tokenism. Importantly community groups want to see action as a result of engagement and feedback that evidences that fact. Therefore anything that picks up these frustrations will be likely to improve the situation.

4. **While consultation has been undertaken in the Neighbourhood management priority areas to determine those communities priorities, it is still in its infancy and a robust two way engagement provcess is still to be finalised. It has also suffered from lack of continuity with managers to take this issue forward . To work , the community will need to get to know and trust their local neighbourhood manager, and they need to be empowered to influence decision making at the local level . They should also be trusted with a 'small' budget to apply to their own priorities. The local area will need a community management group empowered to do the above. Engagement is not being involved in the discussion ,its being involved in the decision.**

5. If encouraged , 'new communities' will engage. They often do via Legal Rights forums, Refugee forums and the like. The council should establish where they do engage, then go to them. not always expect them to come to us.

6. We are aware other authorities are struggling with these issues, therefore the authority should not try to reinvent the wheel but look for some innovative best practice.

We would be happy to discuss this further.

Tony Hurrell  
Bill Edwards

## Appendix B

I am responding from my home email having given some thought to the request, and as I understand the deadline is Monday noon, and I have a meeting before noon that will prevent me replying on my work email.

The issue that seems to me to have the highest priority is to provide the community with a mechanism for addressing shortfalls where the County Council or the Police are the responsible party. This might have to be achieved through a scrutiny committee, which can synthesise public concerns into resolutions that Northants County Council and the Police be asked to address, and be seen to be asked to address, and be recorded as failing to address.

The transfer of so many powers such as transport, streets, pavements, highway maintenance to NCC, and their outsourcing of these roles to contractors such as Atkins Global, has massively disenfranchised the people of Northampton. Street Doctor is a conspicuous failure. NCC officials disregard concerns about things that are contracted out. Contractors are under no real obligation to respond to public concerns, especially as they are not being held to contract by NCC. The police also appear to be disregarding local issues, and the new local level initiatives are hardly visible. There is a growing public frustration.

That frustration is not aimed at NCC or the police but at NBC. For one thing people do not fully understand that powers affecting their wellbeing inside the town are being run by the county council. Many aspects of civic services that people always took for granted as being responsibilities of the town, are now being handled by remote outsiders who do not seem to respect the electorate.

It is in NBC's interests as well as the Northampton community, for NBC to provide a mechanism for representing public frustration to NCC and the police, and demonstrating that this has not been complied with. That will strengthen NBC and appease a lot of public concern.

At the same time more scrutiny of the response of internal officers is needed. I have had a succession of email exchanges with one NBC official recently who is being deliberately obtuse. He answers marginals to my questions and ignores the rest. Piecemeal he is gradually answering my points, but I do get the feeling he thinks himself cleverer than the ratepayers. Now this might be just my perception of one member of NBC staff, and he might be as nice as pie normally, but if I am not the only person encountering obtuse behaviour, a scrutiny panel is needed to try to resolve such impasses.

Regarding the new groups that replace Neighbourhood Committees, the Neighbourhood Managed Areas, could NBC do something to ensure that NCC sends representation, and also that the police send effective representations. My own experience is that NCC's continual absence greatly limits what can be done, for the aforementioned reasons, and NBC needs to be bold and flag up to Central Government the fact that NCC is not engaging in community consultation. The police keep sending rookies to these sessions for training purposes, who have no idea what was discussed at previous meetings, and are unable to contribute without going back for orders, where their similarly uninformed substitutes next meeting are equally unable to inform. Again I feel it is NBC's responsibility to flag up pathetic police support, and be seen to uphold democracy, and not be passive to NCC and the police's bad behaviour.

The same applies to higher-level consultations such as Town Centre Commission Steering Group, where NCC's pathetic presence holds everything back. NBC needs to be seen as proactive not passive.

Another area I feel could be addressed is to carry forward key issues raised in Forums and Community Groups into the public domain, using questionnaires on-line and at information pick up points, where a wider population can be consulted than participates through forums etc. These could be issues where the forums or other groups are limited in scope by the numbers of participants are few, where throwing the question open might generate a clearer message and better information about solutions.

## Appendix B

One of the problems facing forum participants is the means of representing issues into specialist committees. I know the public can observe many committees but cabinet and portfolios put an end to a lot of important community involvement in decision-making. I particularly regret the loss of the Health Committee. At present co-chairs and forum members have to canvass the portfolio holder to take up issues on their behalf, and the process is largely invisible. Increased transparency and participation is needed.



**Witness Core Questions**

- How well do you think the Council consults with you? Please give examples.
- Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why.
- How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?
- Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Community Groups? If not, please give details why.
- In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?
- Any additional information that you feel would inform the review.

**Glossary of Terms**

Detailed below are some of the terms used by Northampton Borough Council, which explain how the Council uses or interprets a term, phrase or abbreviation.

Annual Report	Scrutiny Committees summarise their work and findings in an annual report.
Audit Commission	The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is used economically, efficiently and effectively. It regulates the proper control of public finances by local authorities and the National Health Service, and is responsible for conducting inspections relating to Best Value Reviews and to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of local councils.
Allowance	A payment towards expenses or costs.
Members' Allowances	Paid to Members in recognition of out of pocket expenses or direct costs of being a Member of the Council
Best Value	Relates to the Local Government Act, 1999 - the means by which the Council seeks to deliver high quality services in an efficient and cost effective way
BVPP	Best Value Performance Plan
Backbencher	A term applied to Members who are not part of the Cabinet

Budget	The annual summary of income and Expenditure
By-Election	An election which occurs between main (4 yearly) elections
Cabinet (Executive)	The Cabinet body of elected Councillors responsible for day-to-day running of the Council and the development of policy. Cabinet Members have portfolios or areas of responsibility (e.g. Housing) for which they take cabinet decisions.
Call-in	The process by which Overview and Scrutiny Committees can look at whether a decision is properly taken or is the right decision and require it to be considered.
Casting vote	A second vote made by the chair of the meeting to decide a matter when there is a tied vote
Chair/Deputy Chair	The person who chairs a Committee of the Council e.g. a Scrutiny Committee.
Chief Executive	The most senior paid official of the Council with overall responsibility for the whole of the Council's operation
Coalition	An alliance of groups or parties

Code of Practice/Code of Conduct	A set of rules, usually of expected behaviour
Census	Since 1801, every 10 years the nation has set aside one day for the Census - a count of all people and households. It is the most complete source of information about the population that we have. The latest Census was held on Sunday 29 April 2001.
Community Strategy	Under the Local Government Act 2000, all Councils are required to work in partnership with the community as well as private, voluntary and public sector partners to develop a long-term strategy to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of their local communities.
Co-Opted Member to a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group	An individual with an area of expertise or experience who is invited to sit on a Committee or Work Group (either for the Municipal year or for the duration of a specific review) to provide information and advice to maximise effective decision-making.
Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)	<p>A performance management framework for Councils to draw together all the assessments made by the inspectorates, external Audit and Government departments.</p> <p>Councils are rated in one of five categories (excellent, good, fair, weak, poor). One of the main outcomes of the assessment will be an action plan for</p>

	<p>improvement and a programme of work for the subsequent year.</p>
Constitution	<p>The set of rules governing the decision-making arrangements and activities of Northampton Borough Council.</p>
Council	<p>The term used for the organisation or in respect of the meeting of all of the Councillors</p>
Councillor (or Member)	<p>An elected local representative on the Council, a Councillor represents the interests of the people who live in their ward and Northampton as a whole.</p>
Council Tax	<p>The money raised by the Council from residents of the Borough</p>
Cross-cutting review	<p>A cross-cutting review addresses a topic which covers more than one service area, and in certain cases, examines services provided by organisations other than the Council (e.g. the police, health trusts, voluntary sector organisations, etc). One of the aims of such a review is to ascertain how well the various agencies communicate and work together, and to put forward recommendations for</p>

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)	improvements in this area. The central Government Department with primary responsibility for Local Government matters.
Directors	The most senior paid officials, after the Chief Executive, each having responsibility for wide areas of the Council's operations
Elected Mayor	An individual elected directly by the electorate (not councillors) to run the Council [Not a system adopted in Northampton].
Employee	A paid official of the Council sometimes referred to as an Officer.
Executive	See Cabinet.
Exempt information	Information which is exempt from the normal publication rules (normally under Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act, 1972)
Forward Plan	A list of key decisions which will be taken by the Cabinet. The plan is updated each month.
Head of Paid Service	A statutory role, usually combined with that of Chief Executive
Home Office	The Government department responsible for internal affairs in England and Wales, e.g. public order,

<p>Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)</p>	<p>public safety, immigration, etc.</p> <p>The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) was established by and for Local Government in April 1999. It aims to: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- deliver practical solutions to improve local government performance</li> <li>- develop innovative approaches to ensure the transfer of knowledge within local government</li> <li>- act on behalf of local government as a whole, promoting joined-up, locally delivered services</li> </ul>
<p>Independent Member</p>	<p>Either a Councillor who is not a member of a recognised political party also, or in the context of the Standards Committee, a member who is neither a Borough Councillor or a Parish Council representative.</p>
<p>Key Decision</p>	<p>An important decision which affects more than one ward of the Council or will involve spending of large amounts of money. They must be made public and can only be taken after appropriate notice</p>

<p>Leader of the Council</p>	<p>The political head of the Council, usually the leader of the largest group of Members (or coalition) - responsible for the proposal of policies and day to day running of the Council.</p>
<p>Local Government Association (LGA)</p>	<p>The LGA represents the local authorities of England and Wales – a total of just under 500 authorities. There are 34 county councils, 36 metropolitan borough councils, 47 English unitary authorities, 33 London authorities, 238 shire district councils and 22 Welsh unitary authorities. The LGA also represents police authorities, through the Association of Police Authorities (APA); fire authorities and passenger transport authorities.</p>
<p>Local Government Information Unit (LGIU)</p>	<p>The LGIU is an independent research and information organisation supported by over 150 councils and the local government trade unions.</p> <p>The LGIU aims to be an advocate for strong democratic local government with the financial base and powers required to act with and on behalf of local communities.</p>
<p>Local Government Ombudsman</p>	<p>The nationally appointed person (department) which looks into complaints by the public about the way they have been treated by or the</p>



	<p>service they have received from councils</p>
Manager	<p>An employee who is responsible for managing employees, resources and services</p>
Member (Councillor)	<p>A Councillor; the elected representative of the community</p>
Member of the Public	<p>Anyone who is not a part of the Council</p>
Minutes	<p>The formal record of the proceedings of a meeting</p>
Monitoring Officer	<p>The officer appointed under the Local Government and Housing Act, 1989 to oversee the legality of the Councils actions and the ethical behaviour of Members and employees</p>
Northampton Borough Council (NBC)	<p>The local authority, which delivers borough council services to the whole of Northampton. These are mostly different to the services provided by Northamptonshire County Council.</p>

Officer	A paid official of the Council
Overview and Scrutiny	<p>The process offers both opportunities and challenges for Councillors and members of the public to improve the quality and delivery of services the Council provides to its local communities. The work of overview and scrutiny includes:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Policy Development and Review</li> <li>- Oversight of the Best Value Review Programme</li> <li>- Holding the cabinet to account</li> </ul>
PI	Performance Indicator
Policy	<p>A plan of action or approach to an issue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- part of the Council's Policy Framework</li> </ul>
Policy and Financial Framework	The Council's main policies and approach to managing its finances
Political Proportionality/Balance	The system by which each group is represented on Council bodies in proportion to the number of members of the particular group relative to the size of the council as a whole
Portfolio Holder	A Member of the Cabinet with responsibilities for specific aspects of the Council's policy or work

Protocol	A document, which sets out, how people will behave or matters will be handled.
Referendum	A ballot of all electors of the Borough - in particular on whether they wish to have an elected mayor
Regulatory	The functions of the Council which "regulate" e.g. licensing and planning.
Rules of Procedure	The rules that govern the way specified matters must be handled. (previously known as Standing Orders)
Scrutiny	(See Overview and Scrutiny). The way in which Members oversee the work of the Council and investigate the needs of the community
Scrutiny Review	<p>A study led by Scrutiny Councillors on a current issue, selected by the Committee. It aims to identify areas of good as well as poor practice, compare performance with other councils' countrywide, and challenge existing practice where relevant.</p> <p>The review will lead to recommendations for improvements to relevant Cabinet Members as well as outside agencies, such as health trusts. While these are not obliged to support</p>

	<p>the recommendations, effective consultation has been proven to lead to consensus and to Cabinet support for reviews undertaken.</p>
Standards Board	<p>The national body which oversees ethical standards of behaviour</p>
S151 Officer	<p>The finance officer employed under s151 of the Local Government Act, 1972 - who is responsible for the financial probity and arrangements of the Council</p>
Ward	<p>An area of Northampton for which elections are conducted</p>
Work Programme	<p>The Work Programme sets out the work of the Committee for the 12-month period, although it may go beyond this.</p>

**Council Speak Bingo Card**

Appendix B

Forum	L.S.P.	Portfolio Holder	Sit on...
Mayor	CYPP	Ward	Chair
Working Party	L.A.A.	Consultation	Whip
Council	U.K.Y.P.	Scrutiny	Pass a motion
Minutes	SCT	Cabinet	Apologise

# consulting people

Appendix F



Portsmouth  
CITY COUNCIL

customers | stakeholders | citizens



consulting people

**PROCESS  
APPROVED  
FOR BEST VALUE**



# the toolkit



**Welcome to the toolkit.** It will help us to consult and involve people in what we do. It's designed so that you can 'plug in' your service or issue at the beginning and it will lead you through what you will need to do. It contains simple tools to enable you to consult effectively. **It's the agreed Portsmouth City Council approach.**

When consulting on your service or any other issue you will probably need to focus on finding out about the needs, concerns, priorities and satisfaction levels of your current and potential service users and other stakeholders.

### Everyone's different.

Everyone has a unique set of needs and views.

It's your job to understand and respond to them. This toolkit will help you to put customers at the heart of everything we do.



call **023 9283 4050**  
if you need any help or  
email **consult@portsmouthcc.gov.uk**



## The need to consult people on what we do for them is hotting up.

Because:

- Our organisation has chosen, through its core policies and general approach to be customer focused.
- Local people are less likely to accept poor quality services or decisions they disagree with. (79% want us to make more effort to find out their views).
- Councils must act on the results of consultation. It's the law.

Legislation makes it our duty to consult our local people on all aspects of our services. Quite a challenge. More than that, we must be able to demonstrate that we have acted on what we have found out and that we've improved our services as a result.

These four stages are the agreed framework for consultation at PCC. This booklet will give you tools to work through the key stages.

### listening to customers



**stage one:**  
decide WHO to consult with



**stage two:**  
decide WHAT to consult on



**stage three:**  
decide HOW to ask them



**stage four:**  
START the consultation

involving  
action  
evaluating  
methods  
dec





## stage one | deciding who to consult

Appendix F

Everyone involved in your service has a view on how it could be improved. Non users, staff, councillors, suppliers, local people, agencies and organisations as well as your key customers will all be full of ideas on how to improve the service.

You will need to work out **who** your stakeholders are and plan to consult them all. **You should start with the main customers/users of your service.** For example if you were to consult on making improvements to a local park, you would probably need to consult with park users, people who live nearby, the rangers, local agencies or groups, businesses, the contractor and people who don't use the park (to find out why not).

You can start here by thinking which service, issue or challenge you want to consult on. Try to think in terms of smallest service unit that's appropriate eg. Pest Control not Environmental Health.

Tools 1 and 2 that follow on the next page should help you to map out who your stakeholders are. The first is a checklist to give you some ideas of who your consultees should be and the second is a reminder to make special efforts to listen to certain types of people who are sometimes harder to reach.

### Remember:

- Use a phased approach - who will you listen to first?
- Pilot things and learn and improve as you go
- Keep a record of who you are going to consult and why (eg for Equality Impact assessments)

You cannot consult with absolutely everyone about absolutely everything. Do whatever you feel an objective observer would think reasonable and appropriate





## tool 1 use this checklist to draw a simple map of your stakeholders

### Key Customers

- People who pay directly.
- People who pay indirectly (eg through council tax).
- Users of 'collective' services (eg roads, street lights).
- Internal customers (eg other staff).



### Non-Users

- People who are unaware of the service.
- Dissatisfied ex-customers.
- People who might need the service at a later date.

### Others

- People we enforce against or who are regulated (eg landlords).
- Citizens/local people.
- Businesses.
- Interested agencies - voluntary, private, public sector.
- People affected by policies or development (eg planning).
- Local Councillors, Neighbourhood Forum, MP's carers/advocates/community boards etc.



For lots of reasons, you will need to make particular arrangements to find out some people's views.

For example:

- People who have problems reading, writing and speaking English.
- Some people on low incomes.
- Some people from ethnic minorities.
- Some people who are generally 'too busy'.
- Older people.
- Young people.
- People who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- People who are blind or partially sighted.
- People who have mobility difficulties.

You will need to find innovative ways of consulting with these people. Specialist advice on how to do this is available from the Equalities Unit on 023 9284 1450.





## stage two | deciding what to consult on

Appendix F

Once you have identified the people you need to consult with, you can start thinking about what questions to ask. There are a few key points:

- Don't just ask about things that **you** think are appropriate - think from the customer's point of view. What do they want to tell you about?
- Think clearly about your **objectives** for consulting people - why are you doing it? What decisions will it influence?
- Best Value means we have to **challenge** the way the service is now and question if the need could be met more effectively. Use consultation to explore this key issue.

Avoid asking about things that are just interesting to know - focus on issues that you can change or strongly influence.

Thinking about the points above should lead you to some ideas about what questions to ask.

Once you have done that use tools 3 and 4 that follow to draft some question areas. You can turn them into finished questions later.

Keep a record of why you chose these questions.

Phone 023 9283 4050 if you need any help.



tool 3 think about  
your objectives for consulting

## Which of these do you want to do?

- Compare and challenge the existing service.
- Look for unmet needs.
- Shape the way your service is delivered.
- Measure satisfaction with the service.
- Prioritise future spending.
- Set targets for the service.
- Check out reaction to new ideas or initiatives.
- Look for quality improvements.
- Check opinions, views, attitudes.

It's probably most  
of these and some  
of your own.





Here are some ideas of the type of question areas you might want to ask

- What do people like most/least about the service?
- Is the standard or level of the service right?
- Is the frequency of the service acceptable?
- Is the service reliable?
- What takes too long?
- What about comfort, convenience, safety factors?
- How good is your customer service (eg helpfulness, friendliness)?
- Is the range of services available appropriate?
- Is the service equally accessible by everyone?
- Is there enough information available about the service?
- Is the service good value?

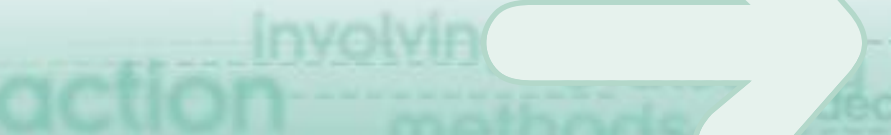
Ideally, you should even consult people on which questions to ask.

involving  
action  
evaluating  
methods  
dec



By now you should have identified the key stakeholders for your service and thought about what to ask them. You will now be able to decide **how** to go about it. Some key points are:

- Use tool 5 & 6 below to select some possible consultation methods (eg. focus group, survey etc).
- Think especially about the **different needs** of different people you wish to consult with – and get a representative sample.
- The Government say that we must use a range of methods for each consultation - one focus group will not do. You need to **'custom build'** a consultation solution for each service or issue.
- Build on what consultation you already have in place, and again look for opportunities to join up with other services/outside agencies. Conduct joint consultation where possible (see info about the 'Big List').
- If you are asking about satisfaction with your service, it is usually best to do this as soon as possible after the service has been delivered (eg. do a follow up phone call or survey card a few days later).
- You will probably need to use a mix of **'quantitative'** methods (eg. surveys where we can measure satisfaction or opinions/surveys numerically) and **'qualitative'** methods (eg. focus groups where we look for more in depth opinions or quality improvements).





## stage three | how to consult continued

Appendix F

Different types of people prefer different consultation methods. Also some methods work better for some things than others.

Tools 5 & 6 should give you some ideas.

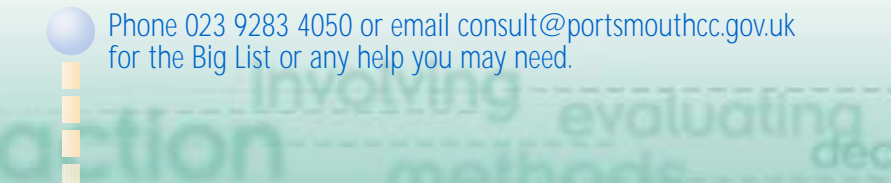
### Some other thoughts are:

- PCC's Strategy Unit co-ordinate all consultation projects across the council. The '**Big List**' is an up to date list of hundreds of surveys etc that others have done at PCC, and a forward listing of planned projects. Please use it to see if there are previous projects which you could get information from, or to link up with a planned project. Use the contact info on the back page to tell us about your projects.
- You can ask the Strategy Unit for more **in depth advice** on selecting methods or we can put you in touch with others who have done similar things so you can pick their brains.
- There are currently two major surveys undertaken regularly by Portsmouth City Council.

They all ask questions of 'ordinary' citizens. You can ask for questions to be incorporated into:

1. **The Residents Survey** - A 1/2 hour personal interview conducted in 1,000 people's homes.
2. **The Residents Postal Panel** - enables mail out questionnaires to 1,000 local people.

Phone 023 9283 4050 or email [consult@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:consult@portsmouthcc.gov.uk) for the Big List or any help you may need.







## tool 5 local research has shown that different people prefer different consultation methods

### Here's a few clues:

- The most popular methods generally are 'having the information sent to them' and 'surveys' (ie) home based consultation.
- There is much less support for public meetings or anything that involves leaving the home.
- People on higher incomes are more likely to favour being on panels/groups etc.
- People on lower incomes are generally less keen on getting involved and feel 'information poor'
- Young people like focus groups and street interviews.
- Older people often like Neighbourhood Forums.





All consultation methods have strengths and weaknesses. Some are more 'representative' than others, some get a more 'in depth' response, some are best if you want a quick response:

- **Postal Surveys** often get a limited response (20% or less) but can be good for when you want to give information as well.
- **Focus Groups** explore issues in details from the customer's point of view. They are good for getting common sense opinions on complex issues.
- **Telephone Surveys** are great when you need a quick response and have simple questions.
- **Personal Interviews** are often the most statistically reliable method because you can control the number and type of people that you ask.

Use a mix of these methods to ensure you reach everyone.

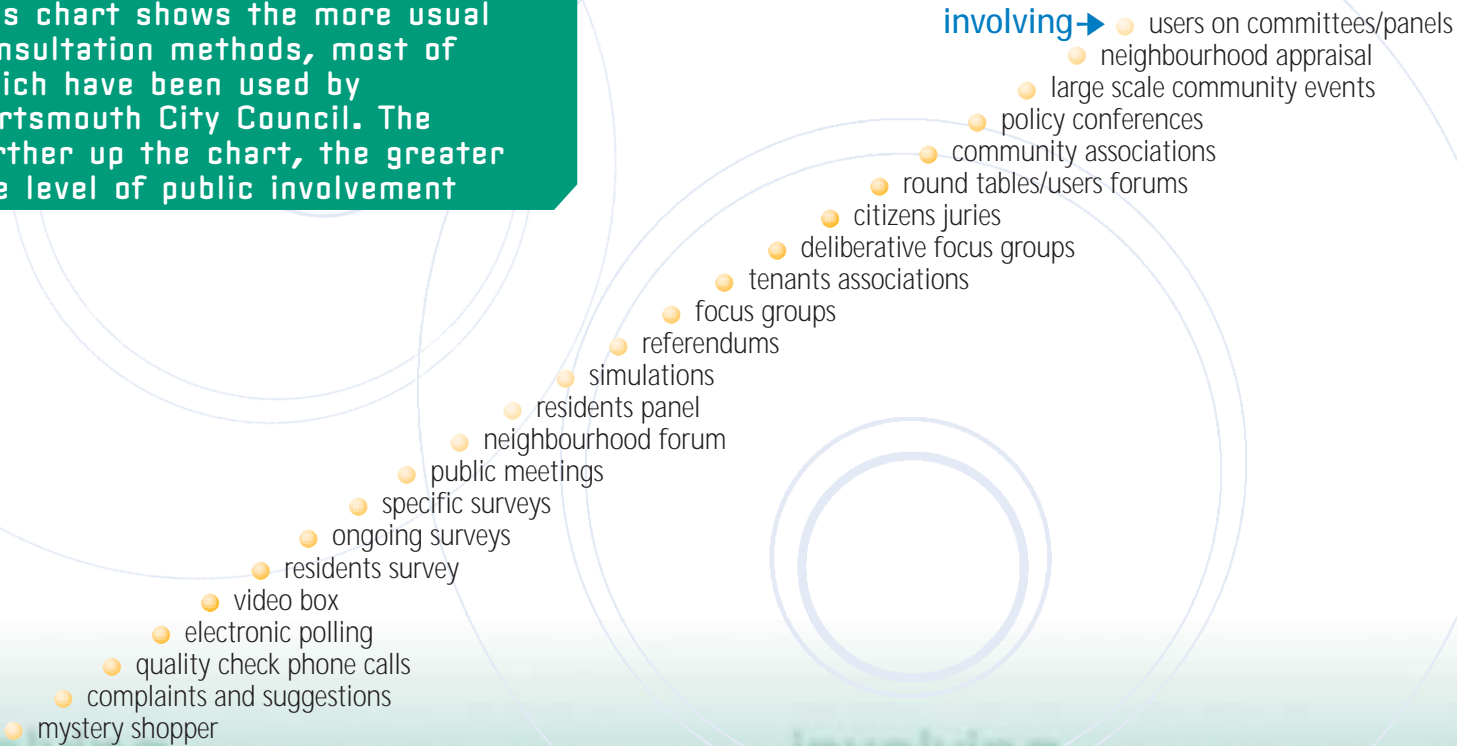


this chart shows the more usual consultation methods, most of which have been used by Portsmouth City Council. The further up the chart, the greater the level of public involvement

tool 6

consulting→

involving→



Please use these charts to think of which methods you might want to use



tool 6 (use it!) this chart shows the main methods of consulting and involving people that you could use

Method	Description	Pros	Cons	Costs
Users on committees/panels	Stakeholder involvement in decision-making bodies	Has real power. Shows users perspective of service provider	Users may get too close representativeness	Low
Neighbourhood appraisal/audit	Local people conduct own study and prepare analysis and plan	Involves residents in whole process. Builds skills and local pride	Needs big input in training and support	Low
Large-scale community events	Various. Bring together locals to give views/produce plan	Can take very full view. Can build consensus and pride in result	Also needs much pre work and balancing ideas	Medium/High
Policy conferences	Extended large meeting, including key stakeholders, breaking into smaller workshops	Gets key people focused clearly on issue. Improves partnership and joined-up working	May be too big to achieve consensus or decision. Raises expectations	Medium/High
Community Associations	Management committee for community centre	Builds local partnership, skills and involvement	Asks a lot from people. May miss majority view	Low
Round tables/user forums	Groups of stakeholders meeting regularly to discuss issues	Bring in important variety of views, knowledge, etc. Can build consensus	Need to be well prepared and supported	Low
Citizens' Juries	Extended group discussing issue and hearing/seeking advice	In-depth look at complex issues. Shows how evidence affects views.	Small selected group may lack credibility. Much work	High
Deliberative groups	Participants gather and have information and chance to discuss before giving opinion	Gets various points of view. Allows in-depth consideration. Shows how views change	Requires quite skilled preparation and facilitation	Medium
Tenants Associations	Body of tenants (or other stakeholders?) meeting formally	Very self-led, strong local involvement	May be a minority. May get adversarial	Low
Focus Groups	Group of people talk about issues and share views	Good in-depth look, includes feelings, responses and results of discussion. Can look at certain types of people	Views of just a few may be misleading People can change when in groups	Medium
Referendums	An open vote on a particular issue for all the public	Easy to understand. Gives a clear message. Open to all in theory	Big effort to set up. Usual turn-out worries	High
Simulations	Proposed arrangements or ideas are tried out in role-play with stakeholder representatives	May get good idea of complex and unpredictable possibilities. Shares points of view	Needs good facilitation and running. Can only involve a few people	Medium
Residents' Panel	List of people who will respond to periodic surveys	Can be quicker and cheaper than one-off surveys. Gets into how views change, who thinks what and why.	Will pick out more interested types not the average person	Medium/High
Neighbourhood Forums	Locally-run bodies which hold public meetings on local issues	Address local issues. Independent image. Can respond to approaches.	Risk hearing only an active minority	Low
Public Meetings	Open meeting called on specific issue	Allow expression of views on important current topic	Can be adversarial and dominated by minority. Not liked by most people	Low
Specific surveys	Various research into customer needs, views, experience, etc.	Done well can be clear, fair and very informative. Can give good figures	Bad surveys can give poor information. May miss certain groups	Varies
Ongoing surveys	Monitoring of satisfaction with eg. high volume service	Brings standards into service evaluation. Shows trends over time. Can contact less vocal users.	Time-consuming	Medium
Residents' Surveys	Wide-ranging survey, hundreds of interviews every 2 years.	High accuracy, credible. Trends over time. Representative sample.	Relatively expensive. Not quick.	High
Video Box	Booth with camera open to public record views.	Allows very expressive feedback. Needs no literacy or third party.	Can be tricky to organise. Scares some people off.	Medium
Electronic Polling	Use internet, etc, to get views, perhaps set up debates	Good potential for debate and live interaction or access at any time from home or public terminal.	IT puts off many people, others have little or no access to the kit.	Low after set-up
Quality Check phonecalls	Quick follow-up to service delivery to check quality/satisfaction	Quick and customer-responsive. Easy to administer	May be too much for customers	Low
Complaints and suggestions	System to make it easy for customers to give feedback	Fairly easy to do. Customer views are key. Promotes satisfaction	Only gets views of vocal minority - often negative	Medium
Mystery Shoppers	Researchers go into service delivery process as users	Combines user perspective with consulter's questioning	Does not involve real users (normally)	Low

## stage four | start the consultation

You should now be at the stage where you can actually **implement** some consultation. It is important that we all stick to some basic standards. Use tool 7 as a checklist.

### Some local authorities ask people's views, then

- Don't tell them what will happen with the results.
- Don't do anything with the results.
- Don't tell anyone the results.
- Do what they planned they were going to do anyway.
- Ask them the same things again next year.

### We must make sure that we don't do the same.

TIP You could form a team of users/non-users to work with you to oversee the consultation process and use of results.

*"You send us plans that are already sewn up and ask for our comments in two weeks, we need more time than that"*

*"Don't expect to get a few of us together and suddenly represent the whole community - that'll never happen"*

Real PCC customer comments

Involving

evaluating

action

methods

dec

## stage four | standards for consulting

Appendix F


### tool 7 | before you start

#### Ensure that consultees know:

- Who is being consulted and why.
- What decisions will be influenced.
- Who will take these decisions.
- When the decisions will be taken.
- How the results will be fed back to them.
- That anonymity will be respected if requested.
- Who they can contact if they are unhappy about the consultation.

#### Ensure that you have:

- Used plain English and no jargon.
- Avoided any leading or ambiguous questions.
- Offered a choice of consultation methods.
- Thought about involving 'hard to reach' people.
- Made any special arrangements eg interpreters, hearing loops etc.
- Thought about different peoples preferences in terms of methods.
- Planned for how the views of different stakeholders groups will be 'weighed up' against each other.
- Given people plenty of time to respond (12 weeks minimum for written consultations).
- Decided who will do the consultation, in-house or an agency.
- Successfully built consultation into your service review & planning process.

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## There are, of course, lots of risks when consulting.

Some pitfalls to think about are:

- By consulting, you can easily raise expectations that things will change overnight, they won't. Be careful!
- If you consult on a decision that has already been taken, it will come back to haunt you. People know when we are doing 'token' consultation.
- Expect some conflict and pain - if you consult with a range of stakeholders, they will often have opposing views. It's the politician's role to decide how to respond - bearing all these views in mind.
- Don't just put on an event (eg focus groups or policy conference) and expect people to be interested and flock to it. You may need to work hard to engage them.
- If you only allow people to write in on an issue (say following a 'Flagship' article) you may just get unrepresentative responses.



## tool 8 final checklist before consulting

Appendix 1

Just before you start - think about these things again:

Do you know . . . ?

- Who to consult - have you thought of everyone.
- Who's views will be most influential.
- That you have thought of the 'right' issues to focus on.
- That you have selected the most appropriate methods.
- How much it will cost and where the money is coming from.
- What decisions will be affected and when.
- That you have thought about the Data Protection Act and how it might relate to your consultation.

### Make it short and sweet

One local council recently sent a 20 page questionnaire to 180,000 homes at a cost of £100,000. It took 3 hours to fill in and was sent back by just 85 (patient) people. That's £1,200 per response. Not best value!



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A large orange arrow pointing to the right, positioned to the left of the section header.

## What happens after the consultation:

- Don't underestimate the amount of effort required to process data or write reports. Even if you get an agency to do it you may have a lot of work.
- Look at the broad picture painted by the range of consultation you have done. Where is there consensus or conflict?
- You will need to adopt some process for making quality improvements (big and small) based on what you have found out, and for taking any big decisions on budgets etc. Make sure you've thought this through, and keep evidence of why you carried out consultation in a particular way (for monitoring purposes).
- Do further consultation to test out your ideas on how to respond to the consultation (eg ideas for changes to the service).
- Don't be too concerned if the method failed. Evaluate and try again.







# tool 9 | evaluating consultation

Appendix

Local government generally has been attacked for never evaluating consultation.



## We need to prove we're different.

Use this checklist when your consultation is over:

- Were the objectives understood by all stakeholders?
- Did the methods used match the objectives?
- Could we say that a representative set of views were obtained?
- Was the timescale/process transparent and kept to?
- Was the consultation accessible (eg translations, plain English etc)?
- Did you get to the 'hard to reach' people?
- What were the costs (including staff time)?
- Did it lead to a change of policy, service etc?
- How many people will be affected by the changes?

**Think about what you could do better next time to make sure customers are at the heart of everything we do.**



**A full evaluation tool is available - call 023 9283 4050**



# you're not on your own

Appendix F

Hundreds of people across PCC are consulting and there are lots of corporate resources in place. Use the following numbers to ask about:

- Any personal advice you need on any aspect of consultation.
- Web resources to help you.
- Corporate surveys that you might be able to include questions in.
- Sharing best practice and working with others in PCC.
- Training, eg how to choose an agency or how to facilitate focus groups.
- If you want a large print version or a tape of this toolkit.

Please use the hotlines below to be better informed on consultation.



- |   |               |
|---|---------------|
| • Best Value  | 023 9283 4704 |
| • Media, Communications, Publicity                  | 023 9283 4176 |
| • Equalities Unit, involving 'hard to reach' people | 023 9284 1450 |
| • Getting translations                              | 023 9283 4012 |

Consultation hotline  
**023 9283 4050**

email: [consult@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:consult@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)



**NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

13 August, 2007

**PRESENT:**

Councillor Paul Varnsvery	(Chair)
Councillor Tony Clarke	
Thomas Hall	Corporate Manager
Lindsey Cameron	Participation Team Leader
Tracy Tiff	Scrutiny Officer
Councillor Brian Markham	Expert Witness – Item 4

**1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Palethorpe and Councillor Andrew Simpson (Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1).

**2 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2007 were agreed as a true record.

**3 SCOPE**

The scope of the review, as amended, was agreed. Copy attached at Annex 1 to the minutes.

Following a brief discussion regarding Task and Finish Group scopes, Councillors suggested that the Chair take the following recommendations to the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee for consideration: -

- Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups reserve the right to broaden the scope of the review should further evidence be brought out from interviewing expert witnesses.
- A sentence should be added to the purpose/objective of the scope of Overview and Scrutiny reviews:

The Committee will consider any points from the evidence submitted.

**4(a) Thomas Hall, Corporate Manager**

T Hall, Corporate Manager briefly advised the Group of his role in relation to community engagement. Up until approximately 12 months ago, community engagement had been within his remit; this role has now been transferred to N Marzec, Corporate Manager. T Hall commented that he is involved in Safer, Stronger Northampton Partnership and that all Corporate Managers have a role to play in community engagement.

The Group then put its core questions to T Hall: -

**1. How well do you think the Council consults and engages with Community Groups? Please give examples.**

We undertake consultation both with geographic groups – neighbourhoods for example – and sectoral groups. In my opinion this happens mainly when there are specific issues relating to those groups, rather than using them to get views on general issues. The CASPAR+NR partnership in Castle ward has consulted local people on plans for environmental improvements in their area; the Council's race equality scheme has been discussed through the Race Equality Forum. What I feel is lacking is a consistency or co-ordination to this, either in when it is done or how quality is ensured. We also under-use the opportunities that these groups offer to consult on general corporate issues – for example, what do older people feel about parks and open spaces.

Engagement of course goes further, and I do not think that this Council is very far down that road. The idea behind neighbourhood management is to give a say in decision-making and resource allocation to local people but this is in its infancy here. One example which has occurred is the work with young people on how the 'Money for Youth' budget was to be spent.

**2. Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why.**

No, and perhaps they never will be due to the changing nature of the community. It will always be easier for us to make links with groups that are more self-aware, usually well established and articulate, and may be localised. That means that new immigrant groups could lose out, especially as there will be a lag before we become aware of the significance of some groups or how to contact them. At other extremes, I feel that both Travellers and the business community might feel that they are not consulted except occasionally on very specific issues.

**3. How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?**

- Systematic – our consultation should be planned with a purpose and integrated into other planning and decision-making processes
- Quality – consultation needs to be thought through and delivered well by people who understand the issues and pitfalls. But it also needs to give value for money, and the benefits from doing it should be spelled out in advance, along with the costs

Appendix G  
● Culture – we do not yet always see consultation (still less engagement) as a positive way of improving what we do, to be welcomed

Consultation could be improved by the Council having a bank of accessible knowledge for consultation that it could confidently rely upon the results.

There is a need for feedback to be given to those who participate in consultation. If their suggestions are not taken on board, they should be informed of this together with the reasoning. There is also the need to ensure that people understand how the information that they have provided has been used and why sometimes the Council decides not to do things that they have decided. T Hall confirmed that this type of feedback is happening internally across the Council but there is the need for it to be widened out externally.

**4. Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Groups? If not, please give details why.**

I am not fully aware of all that is being done through Neighbourhood Management; it is of course a relatively new way of working here and still needs to be embedded. The issues I raise above are relevant here (e.g. in 1 and 2), particularly that some groups are not concentrated in particular areas. For example, individuals from certain ethnic minority groups tend to live in specific neighbourhoods, and for them a Neighbourhood Management approach may be very helpful. But for others and for other sectors this will not be true – so far as I know there is not a particular part of town where the majority of our lesbian, gay and bisexual citizens live. Their distinctive voice probably needs other channels, to complement Neighbourhood Management.

I also feel that, inevitably, it will be the more established individuals and groups who will fit most easily into Neighbourhood Management (NM) structures unless we make a determined effort to reach beyond them. ‘Community leaders’ have an important role to play but we also need to be developing or encouraging new leaders. Language is likely to be a barrier, and not just for the more recently arrived groups; NM will need resources to communicate effectively with all their constituents.

**5. In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?**

Among residents, I think that the geographical approach of NM supplemented with the ‘sectoral’ approach based on factors like age, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, gender is right. I feel that the Council should be able to engage with those who are ‘hard to hear’ but also encourage communities which have organised themselves to have a part. I am concerned about some groups whose needs may be great but could be excluded, particularly travellers, new populations from parts of the world with internal conflict such as Somalia where we can assume that those tensions persist in our local population, and the ‘white non-British’ group including East Europeans who are less visible but may be equally vulnerable.

The other groups which we may be in danger of ignoring are the non-residents, particularly businesses and those who work or play in the town. For example, any proposals around the town’s major cultural facilities (theatres, museums etc) should take account of the wider area from which users are drawn.

6. **Any additional information that you feel would inform the review.**

We should take all opportunities to do consultation and engagement in partnership with other public agencies, who are all facing similar pressures. This not only provides greater efficiency, but presents a more 'joined up- face to the public. A good example is the consultation within local areas by the police Safer Community Teams on local priorities, work which is equally valuable to this Council.

The Task and Finish Group made comment on T Hall's responses above and asked supplementary questions: -

- The Council appears to be reactive in its approach to community engagement and there is a need for it to be more proactive but it was acknowledged that there would be occasions when it could only be reactive.
- It needs noting that individuals from other countries now residing in the UK need to be large enough before they are recognised as a specific group.
- Groups have common needs but it also needs to be acknowledged that individuals within the Groups also have distinctive, separate needs.

**7 Whose duty is it to engage/participate with sub cultures within the community, e.g. NBC, NCC, the Police, and Health Service?**

It is not a specific role for any one Agency but it is a role that needs to be undertaken. It could possibly be the Local Strategic Partnership as it is looking at community cohesion. It would also be beneficial to ascertain which Agency had the best resources, for example, engagement led by the Police might be inappropriate for some groups. Agencies need to liaise with each other.

**8 Is there a nationally symposia planned regarding community engagement approaches?**

There are a series of conferences available on various topics. There are also structured national debates. Whenever there are changes in Government policy, it is always accompanied by a flurry of opportunities of training and conferences.

**9 As an Authority it needs to ensure consultation is about what it does**

Communication and having dialogue with the public is a good thing. Ultimately, the point has got to be what the Council is going to do regarding service delivery. This must be the end goal. There are various methods of consultation. There is a need to demonstrate to external mentors that the Council is undertaking effective consultation with positive outcomes. The goal has to be to improve services and quality of life.

**10 As an author taking reports to Committee, would you feel it useful or cumbersome to have a specific implications section within the report on consultation?**

It might help. From previous experience, such paragraphs are often treated as 'add on' pieces of work and Officers may or may not take them seriously, unless the author feels that they are important.

#### **14. How should the Council engage with individuals where there is little or no engagement?**

It is difficult. Consultation must be a voluntary process. If people choose to cut themselves off they cannot be forced to engage. A good question to ask such individuals would be to find out how they interact with the outside world, for example, television or radio. The Council could then consult via such methods but this would be very expensive.

T Hall added that the Police response to neighbourhood management is complicated. It already has its own agenda for neighbourhood policing. Safer Stronger Community Teams cover the whole of the town.

There is a need to address how the Council's service delivery aligns itself to the pressures arising from neighbourhood needs (example was Eastfield Park). The whole resources of the Council cannot be devoted to neighbourhood management due to other commitments and pressures. For example, NBC has budgets and resources for its parks and open spaces, together with a set programme of work. There are also national pressures. He acknowledged that the issue of resources being aligned to neighbourhood management needed resolving.

T Hall was thanked for his informative address.

L Cameron, Participation Team Leader, addressed the Group. He advised that he had been the Council's Diversity and Equality Officer for eight years prior to his current role. He concurred with the majority of T Hall's comments, adding the Council's partnerships and forums often refer to the Council's consultation mechanisms as consultation overload. He felt it would be beneficial to ask the community for its definition of consultation. Often complaints are made regarding the lack of feedback following consultation.

#### **4(b) Councillor Brian Markham**

Councillor Markham commented that he felt the general view of the public was that the Council was not bad at consulting but provision of feedback to the public on the outcomes was poor.

Councillor Markham reminded the Task and Finish Group of the good work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Public Engagement Task and Finish Group during 2005/2006, in particular the focus groups that it set up to engage with the public and groups. These focus groups had been very well received.

He then made reference to the review of the Area Partnerships and Forums that took place during 2006. This review coincided with the introduction of neighbourhood managed areas. Area Partnerships were not considered to be the future but further surveys have indicated that they have been welcomed by the public. He acknowledged that Area Partnerships and the Neighbourhood structure was a mechanism to engage with communities but questioned on what.

Partners need to join NBC in looking at services provided in areas, for example, Eastfield. Service provision and planning of services is all about community engagement.

Councillor Markham then expressed concern that only the managed Neighbourhood areas were supported by the Council's meetings services but the co ordinate areas did not have the same support. He felt that the managed areas would improve and the co ordinate areas

would not. He added that in his opinion, the whole neighbourhood partnership process did not appear to have been planned and co ordinated properly.

The Task and Finish Group then put its core questions to Councillor Brian Markham:

***How well do you think the Council consults and engages with Community Groups? Please give examples.***

I believe that Consultation and Engagement are often treated as being the same thing. They are not.

The Task and Finish Group should also consider whether this question goes far enough. Why should we only seek to consult and engage **Community Groups**? When it comes to **consultation** in practical terms this will often be limited to recognized or existing Forums, Residents Associations and Partners. When setting out to **engage** **we** need to be engaging a far larger section of the public at large or a particular “communities”.

The Council has over recent years been keen to improve both consultation and engagement but this work has been left to a small number of, sometimes excellent, people but is not embedded through out the organisation. For example the original 8 Area Partnerships were under-resourced and in particular there was reluctance from some councillors to involve themselves in the concept.

***Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why.***

Community Groups may be consulted but “Are their views able to influence outcomes?” may be a better question. There is a genuine attempt by many to widen consultation and involve Community Groups through various forums and partnerships the problem has been whether or not the consultation has happened at an early enough stage to enable the results of the consultation to affect the outcome.

***How do you feel the Council’s consultation mechanisms could be improved?***

By devoting more time to both **information** and **consultation** but being clear which is which.

***Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Community Groups? If not, please give details why.***

No but it could do.

The Borough and partners have signed up to developing a Neighbourhood Management model for both engaging the community and for delivery of improvement of services as identified in the LAA. Yet there appears to be little coordination between the various Managed Areas and Coordinated Areas.



Following this model requires both political commitment from all partners and resources both human and financial. None of these have been present in sufficient quantities so far.

***In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?***

We should be seeking to engage everyone not groups or sections of society. However some sections of society have special interests or special needs I think that the existing Forums cater for most of those groups however the way they do this needs reviewing.

***Any additional information that you feel would inform the review.***

Last Year's Service Review of Area Partnerships and Community Forums, which also made recommendations on the introduction of Neighbourhood Partnerships both Managed and Coordinated, could help in your deliberations.

The Task and Finish Group made observations and asked supplementary questions:

- The Council has some excellent departments but it is apparent that there are some that are not so good.
- The Semilong Residents' Forum had a particular housing issue that it required clarification on. It asked for a Housing Officer to attend the last seven meetings. A query was forwarded why there had been non-attendance and it was reported that it was only voluntary for the Officer to attend such a Forum meeting. There is a need to recognise the Council's outward face, as such incidents appear to the public that the Council is not interested in its views.
- There needs to be more engagement across the Council departments. Community engagement is a priority for the Council.

**When Northamptonshire County Council withdrew from the previous Area Partnership scheme did it introduce its own scheme?**

NCC withdrew from the joint Area Partnerships with Borough Council and also ended its own Area Committee system. All Local Authorities had to work together to produce the Local Area Agreement (LAA); NCC took the lead in Northamptonshire. Neighbourhood management in Northampton is seen to have taken on board the work done by CASPAR and also as a delivery mechanism of information to deprived areas. Neighbourhood management requires commitment for it to work efficiently and effectively.

A Cabinet decision was made in 2006 to introduce neighbourhood management. The general approach and areas were also approved. Following the Cabinet meeting a series of workshops, facilitated by a Government recommended facilitator on the workings of neighbourhood management were held.

Councillor Markham was thanked for his address.

The Task and Finish Group suggested that a possible recommendation of its final report could be:

**That more work in the managed neighbourhood areas is required so that they can be up and running effectively and efficiently. It is noted that the process may take longer to introduce in the co-ordinated areas.**

#### **4(C) Written Evidence received so far**

The Task and Finish Group noted the evidence received from:

- Mrs M Pritchard, Secretary, Federation of Residents' Associations
- Councillor Jean Hawkins, NBC
- Mr C Swinn, Vice Chair, NTACT
- Ms B Mennell, NTACT Member

Officers would produce a summary of the main points of all written evidence and produce it to the next meeting.

#### **5 Officers' Reports**

##### **Groups the Council currently engages with**

The list of the Groups that the Council currently engages with was noted

##### **Glossary of Terms used by the Council – Community Engagement**

The Glossary of Terms used by the Council in respect of Community Engagement was noted.

##### **Review of the Report – NBC – Area Partnerships and Forums 2006**

The Executive Summary and recommendations of the Report – NBC – Area Partnerships (2006) was noted.

##### **Map detailing geographical areas of Neighbourhood Partnerships**

The above map was noted.

## **Results of Desktop Research**

The results of desktop research so far were noted.

The Group commented: -

- Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit was excellent and would be a good document to use when compiling the final report.
- The fact that Involve has been commissioned to create a web-based resource of information on community engagement should be referred to in the final report. This information had not yet been published but could be a useful tool for Local Authorities when carrying out consultation.

## **7 Any Other Business**

The Chair commented that T Hall would be welcome to attend future meetings, if he felt it appropriate.

## **8 Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting was noted as 23 August 2007 commencing at 2pm.

The final meeting was scheduled for 4 September 2007, at which the Chair's report would be finalised.

The meeting concluded at 4.10pm

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

#### **1. Purpose/Objectives of the Review**

- To review the Council's engagement activities, including Neighbourhood Management.
- To review how community engagement could be improved and what Groups the Council should be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new and difficult to reach communities who are not currently represented.

#### **2. Outcomes Required**

- To recommend mechanisms, practice and evaluation that enables all local people and Community Groups to have a voice.
- To produce an outline and recommend the preparation of a Community Engagement Strategy.
- To recommend methods to manage the information collected as a result of the improvement in engagement, in order that it informs policy-making, service delivery and design.

#### **3. Information Required**

- An analysis of the Council's current method of engagement, including successes and failures of engaging with the community.
- A synopsis of all information currently available.
- Verbal evidence from employees, Borough and County Councillors.
- Written evidence from community organisations and groups.
- Best practice Councils.

#### **4. Format of Information**

- Officer reports/presentations
- Maps showing how areas are currently geographically split
- Baseline data
- Best practice external to Northampton
- Witness interviews/evidence
- Portfolio Holder evidence

#### **5. Methods Used to Gather Information**

- Minutes of the meetings

- Desktop research
- Examples of best practice
- Witness Interviews/evidence: -
  - Community and Councillor Co-Chairs of the Community Forums
  - Residents' Associations
  - Parish Councils
  - Chair of Northampton Tenants and Council Together (NTACT)
  - Mrs B Mennell, member of NTACT
  - Faith Leaders
  - Community Leaders
  - NBC and NCC Councillors
  - T Hall, Corporate Manager, NBC
  - L Ambrose, Area Partnerships and Forums Co-Ordinator, NBC
  - P Gadhia, NCC
  - J Tinker, Strategic Neighbourhood Manager, NCC

## **6. Co-Options to the Review Committee**

None for this review. However all Task and Finish Groups should consider the provision of an external advisor.

## **7. Evidence gathering Timetable**

July – September 2007

30 July	Scoping the review
13 and 23 August	Evidence gathering
4 September	Finalise Chair's report

## **8. Responsible Officers**

Lead Officers	Simone Wade
Co-ordinator	Tracy Tiff

## **9. Resources and Budget**

Simone Wade, Policy and Governance Manager, and Thomas Hall, Corporate Manager, to provide support and advice.

## **10 Final report presented by:**

Completed by September 2007. Presented by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 and then to Cabinet.

## **11 Monitoring procedure:**

To review the impact of the report after six months (March 2008).

**NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**  
**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

**Thursday, 23 August 2007**

**PRESENT:**

Councillor Paul Varnserry - Chair  
Councillor Tony Clarke

Simone Wade - Policy and Governance Manager  
Tracy Tiff - Scrutiny Officer

**Expert Witnesses**

L Ambrose - Area Partnerships and Forums Co-Ordinator  
C Swinn - Vice Chair, NTACTION

**1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Wilson and Councillor Simpson (Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1).

**2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 AUGUST 2007**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 August 2007 were agreed as a true record.

Councillor Clarke supported the amended scope of the review, in particular, the request that will be made to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 that Task and Finish Groups reserve the right to broaden their scopes should further evidence be brought out from witness evidence.

**3 WITNESS EVIDENCE**

**(A) PORTFOLIO HOLDER - COUNCILLOR BRENDAN GLYNANE**

It was agreed that as the timescale for interviewing Councillor Glynane was put back that he be asked to provide written evidence.

**(B) LINDSEY AMBROSE - AREA PARTNERSHIPS AND FORUMS CO-ORDINATOR**

L Ambrose, Area Partnerships and Forums Co Ordinator, was interviewed by the Task and Finish Group. Examples of documents and materials that had been produced by the Forums, in particular, the Youth Forum, were circulated.

She referred to terminology and gave a definition of the following for the purposes of her responses: -

- **“Community Groups”** may refer to community organisations or to more broadly defined communities of interest including sometimes so-

called 'hard-to-reach groups' and those individuals from more newly arrived communities who may not yet be sufficiently established within the local community to have formed community organisations. For the purposes of my answers I am taking it to assume that the term used in the questions is referring to the broadest understanding of the phrase e.g. disabled people, women, ethnic minorities, etc and not only to community organisations in the voluntary or statutory sectors with formal constitutions and terms of reference.

- **“Community Engagement”** is a term which may include consulting, communication, involving etc of people in the community. It may occur in neighbourhood renewal, community development, community safety, leisure services etc. To some people working in the field it may have specific technical meanings.

L Ambrose then provided a response to the Group's core questions: -

**1. How well do you think the Council consults and engages with Community Groups? Please give examples.**

Need to follow up some pieces of work:-

- Community Engagement Task & Finish Group (spring 2006)
- Service Review of Area Partnerships and Forums (autumn 2006)
- Community Engagement Strategy and Consultation (2005)

Communities of Interest

**i. Youth**

**– the Youth Forum**

- i. is acknowledged as a high flyer in the county at least; positive reputation e.g. the way in which youth are involved in Holocaust Memorial and community cohesion activities.
- ii. involves many hundreds of young people in Northampton each year e.g. via the schools in its annual elections process; has developed increasing diversity in its membership without targets. Current members include Muslim, catholic, C of E, a member who has lived in many countries around the world, a member who has come from Eastern Europe, members with disabilities, gifted young people, young people now at work, VI formers. It has one of the broadest age ranges in the county with its youngest member being 12 years old.
- iii. established links to Countywide youth Forum and UK Youth Parliament; many links to school councils in accordance with best practice, helping the young people to work with young people in and from localities of Northampton.



- iv. links with local radio – e.g. radio interviews on the multi-cultural countywide radio station Inspiration FM on BBC Radio Northampton. It has also featured on Northants 96 during 2007.
- v. information sometimes goes to the supplementary schools in Northampton too, enabling communication and potential involvement of young people from newly-arriving communities.
- vi. good working relationships with key contacts in schools which e.g. through contact with Kingsthorpe Community College involved around 200 young people in responding to work undertaken by Scrutiny on Leisure Services; I worked with schools in 2006 to make links to Local Democracy Week and Citizenship curriculum, resulting in Northampton having excellent numbers of ideas for new youth projects being sent in for Youth Forum to shortlist from. Some schools have put up noticeboards to help young people find out what their reps are doing.
- vii. The Youth Forum has recently used money 4 youth funding to address comments from youth about not knowing where to find out what's on. In relation to the Youth Festival they organised, they purchase a significant amount of freebie rulers, key-rings, bugs and pens which feature its web pages ([www.northampton.gov.uk/forums](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/forums)) to help young people day to day benefit from information there e.g. useful links to get involved in projects and community activities, and to find out what's done by Forum members. They also took these to Balloon Festival and Duston Day in the Park.

#### **Money 4 Youth (Youth Opportunities Fund and Youth Capital Fund)**

- viii. Since August Northampton's Youth Forum has managed over £200K of funding for youth. It has used the opportunity to extend its engagement to young people not previously involved via organisations such as Pupil Referral Units, Youth Offending Teams, and Northampton Town Football in the Community, Young Carers etc. Current figures show over 1200 young people recorded as participating in the various projects all over Northampton. The scheme comes to an end in March 2008. It may continue – final central govt advice awaited.
- ix. The scheme has enabled the Youth Forum to support Neighbourhood Management activities e.g. funding projects in Eastfield (YMCA bus project – which went on to involve wider community in clean-up project), King's Heath and Castle/Spring Boroughs.
- x. The scheme has enabled the Youth Forum to support

community cohesion and provide opportunities to break down barriers by funding projects open to all which are for learning activities such as steel pans, dhol drums and kabbadi.

- xi. Mayor's certificates proved popular with youth and youth workers. These get sent out to thank young people for caring enough to send in ideas, whether or not the project idea goes on to be created.
- xii. All projects are technically partnerships of NBC with a community organisation. The money, which came from central government, has enabled the Council to engage with (by reaching into, supporting, investing in, and enabling) communities at a time when such investment would not otherwise have been possible.
- xiii. this scheme has proven popular, generating community good will and positive perceptions of youth. Some projects have attracted external or match-funding. It has light monitoring requirements.
- xiv. I personally feel that the Council's engagement would benefit by allocating small grants-making functions to Youth and other forums in the future.

### **Disabled People's Forum**

- increasing involved statutory sector organisations, not previously involved.
- The Forum has been involved, along with others, in the statutory consultation required to devise a Disability Equality Scheme. The engagement would be better in future if the Forum's objectives were to specify a responsibility around this.
- The forum has naturally attracted people with a range of disabilities and professional interests in disability. Its members include key statutory sector, voluntary sector groups and individuals with disabilities who may participate in community groups or community activities. Sometimes individuals indicate that the way their little group or networks are organised does not fit with the concept of having a single representative – that would only happen for larger, more formally established voluntary and community groups.
- The engagement would be better if we had enough budget to be able to produce posters or even a general leaflet about the Forum so that more people could know about it. Budget only just about covers basic meetings and taxi costs (for those without cars and unable to use public transport). We also do not have budget to pay expenses in the way we would for volunteering activities, so this limits how much can reasonably be asked in terms of people who attend meetings.
- The Forum has successfully influenced council decisions and service-developments. It would be better if the Council made

- more use of the Forums.
- The Access Group's remit has recently been passed to this Forum, without prior consultation, as a budget saving. There are some potential advantages to this. However, one weakness is capacity in terms of officer support another is the loss of budget previously associated with participation in that group.
  - I personally feel that it would be an enhancement if links to localities and local area forum working (NPs/NMAs) were established. Beneficial outcomes could include:  
avoiding/reducing duplication, being able to see when issues are not just 'local' but are part of a bigger picture that should be addressed as such, maximising capacity of council officers and partners e.g. in putting on events involving the community.

### **Pensioners Forum**

- Recently made links to countywide working through NCC's Active Ageing Network and Northants Older People's Advisory Group; Older People's Champion for NBC now a member; it would be better to have more direct links to the Local Area Agreement.
- membership, in line with best practice, of BGOP (Better Government for Older People) applies to the Forum itself. The membership gives, via NOPAG and otherwise, a line of communication to/from central government. BGOP is supported by all the main political parties.
- The Forum has for many years belonged to the NPC (National Pensioners Convention – national non-party political umbrella group) and has taken an active role with it.
- The Forum has many members who are active in one or more small community groups, but who request to be recorded as 'individuals' on the Minutes of meetings.
- Other issues are much as for Disabled people's forum.

### **LGB People's Forum and NIAG (Hate Crimes Forum)**

- This Forum is strong in a 'representative' way, but relies heavily on a currently mostly unfunded relationship with NLGBA to work well. NLGBA has given NBC a lot of positive publicity free in their newsletter that goes to many organisations and their 300 members e.g. the Council's support for International Day Against Homophobia (taking part with community members in one minute's noise and speeches on the Guildhall steps) featured as front-page news in their OUTAKE newsletter.
- The loss of Sean Silver and changes to the county hate crimes forums structure have left us currently with a lot of uncertainty about where work done by NIAG fits. NIAG is a multi-agency group which has undertaken both best practice development and hate crimes casework. It would be better to resolve the relationship of NIAG to the Forum – there is some interest in taking its best practice work into the LGBF as this fits well and would make sense. Casework is likely to move to the Police.

- Other issues are much as for Disabled People's Forum
- People need to bear in mind that it can be especially difficult for LGB community members to attend big gatherings (e.g. single equality forum), due to risks of 'outing' themselves. A safe space is important.

### **Race Equality Forum and MAGRAH (Hate Crimes Forum)**

- The development of NBC's race equality scheme has been much more officer-owned than that of the disability equality scheme, so the forum has had little inputs – just periodically heard updates and been able to comment. Progress towards the Equality Standard has also been slow over past years. The Forum members have sometimes expressed interest in supporting NBC to improve.
- The forum's useful links web page has been popular with community organisations, several of whom have got in touch to ask to be added to it.
- It has operated separately to the MAGRAH, but has included some of the same faces.
- There is an unclear relationship to the BME SRP (BME Sub-Regional Partnership).
- The Forum particularly is weak when trying to do Agenda-based meetings, which may not feel welcoming. It has been at its best when actively engaging community e.g. Refugee Week Event 2006 which broke down barriers to the involvement of more newly arrived communities around some planned activity with identifiable outcomes.
- Refugee and newer-arrived communities are also sometimes engaged through Holocaust Memorial activities
- Engagement of REF would be better too if we had clear plans with outcomes approved by councillors.

### **Women's Forum**

- This has lacked clear objectives and terms of references
- It's meetings have been poorly attended. The Agenda-style lunchtime Minutes meetings is not engaging with a broad spectrum of women.
- The Women's Day annual event attracted a wide range of communities and age ranges as 'International Women's Day' in 2006 with an Agenda which did not involve particularly party political speakers and was issues-based e.g. working in partnership with the Domestic Violence Forum and WNDV. The event is one of many around Women's Day in Northampton. This can make it difficult to organise as resources are stretched around similar activities in localities.
- Other networks use specifically targeted means to reach different groups of women, respecting the many lifestyles of women.
- The Forum has drawn criticism for excluding men as these days absent fathers, step-parenting, paternity leave, childcare issues,

school run, taking leave in school holidays, being victims of domestic violence are known to impact on men as well as women yet in considering community engagement the current forums structure does not recognise this and seems to single out 'women' only in relation to getting feedback and views.

- Engagement might be better addressed if we planned specific engagement for business community or for families with agreed target outcomes.

### **Holocaust Memorial Steering Group**

- The group has had its work nationally recognised, via Sean Silver's award by the Anne Frank Trust. The Trust is now represented on the Group. It brings together community representatives from across many sectors of the community, including some of the often less visible groups e.g. travellers, refugees as well as Forums and more established groups. It has a well-respected credibility for its community cohesion activities and many schools want to be involved.
- The work is to be further enhanced by running Anne Frank Ambassadors and a local awards scheme from 2008 to celebrate positive contributions of youth and educators in the community.

### **General Personal Views**

- The Museums Service has a popular Over 60s club. In terms of Forums activities, members of the community have led in putting ideas for sessions done at their events/open meetings. The work has sometimes challenged perceptions of museums e.g. involving young people.
- Police Safer Community Teams are, I understand, tending to get feedback from majority groups as in other parts of the country but may be interested in working with our Forums as well as NPs/NMAs.
- The Council
  - i. Needs to produce plain English documents (as per Plain English Campaign guidance)
  - ii. Minutes would be more meaningful if they were notes that responded primarily to the needs of the intended audience e.g. pictures, plain English, insert helpful contact details etc. Page numbers would help too.
  - iii. Needs to produce user-friendly guides e.g. re Planning to help people have their say/voice objections appropriately etc.
  - iv. Needs to let people know easily e.g. by self-help on-line/leaflets about how to have a say in meetings, what to expect etc. It's good that we have some council meetings outside of working hours
  - v. The council needs to do more Youth Festival-type activities to help its customers know about opportunities.
  - vi. The council ought to have service plans that give

commitments to communicating news, commitments to considering using the range of mechanisms for consultations etc

- vii. It would be good if the community could have a voice in equality impact assessment processes e.g. to help people in thinking about issues such as sexuality for which they may not be aware or used to thinking through about barriers that may face people.

**Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why.**

The Council could make better use of its existing engagement and consultation mechanisms.

The Council needs to do more planning about how, when and why to involve residents via Neighbourhood Partnerships and Forums.

The Neighbourhood Managed area co-ordinators need to begin meetings with the public soon. I need to be in the loop too to help people find out about how to get involved if they call and also to update the web pages so that people can self-help.

I have received various positive feedback comments re the pages I've created re NMs and NPs, feedback that some people are passing on the web page links to their networks and using information on them. I've had requests from the community and council officers to add their information, so the basic format and approach seems to be on the right lines

The Council has made successive budget cuts to my service area so that it's now difficult to go out into localities to liaise with groups as much as I think would be optimal. I attend NP meetings and some community activities e.g. Duston Day in Park, Balloon Festival, Delapre Fete, Northampton Carnival as and when I can with Youth and other Forums. On the other hand, Money 4 youth has helped to overcome and add value to the contributions I've been able to make as through this community-led small grants process we've created good relationships and extended community capacity to help them to help themselves.

Residents sometimes complain about the over-reliance of the council on the web

It would be better if we made our web attachments more accessible e.g. for people using screen-readers.

It would be better if we designed all our documents to be accessible e.g. many more staff trained on accessibility in relation to colour-blindness, use of mixed cases, use of shadowing and images, use of text boxes and tables, use of word art, use of fonts, use of justified text, use of white space etc. By not

embedding such know how into our work in many ways in which we engage, invite, consult etc we exclude people who need us to work to good practice standards for them to be able to feel welcomed and able to participate. They shouldn't have to ask for alternatives so that they can join in too. We should be looking to the RNIB See It Right guidance and Plain English guidance where possible.

### **How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?**

Put a simple web page on the NBC web pages that links to the various types of meeting we have and explains rules for attendance, speaking, handing in petitions and letters etc – respecting existing web pages but bringing links to them together in one place for the benefit of people who wouldn't know to search for the individual types so wouldn't be likely to include the jargon names in any web search or who may look under 'meetings' for this sort of information.

On the web-site under the heading "Council – general information" remove the current content and replace with content about how the council works, role of councillors etc and links to other pages e.g. lists of councillors, Cabinet etc on the web-site, engagement mechanisms such as re neighbourhood partnerships and forums.

Set up a cross-departmental standing group to liaise about consultation, best practice, planned activities and their communication externally (including giving notice to the Voluntary and Community Sector to help comply with the Compact). That way we can pull together who's doing what and when, whether there are opportunities to ask questions in the same piece of activity on behalf of different teams, plan to make use of mechanisms such as forums, neighbourhood wardens, web etc, maximise capacity and resources and make sure we don't get other people feeling overwhelmed with consultation or feeling we keep asking them the same things.

Youth Forum is currently purchasing a video kiosk the council will be able to use for consultation activities. It should burn DVDs, allow for short film plays as part of surveys, allow for audio and visual or push-button on-screen response for up to 8 questions in a survey. It's portable so can be taken to various locations. It's a means of consultation that complies with good practice for groups such as young people and those with limited knowledge of written English.

When we do surveys it would be good if we could improve our questionnaires e.g. bearing in mind what helps people to fill them in, considering the use to which information will be put – is it meaningful? Measurable?

Revise community funding by NBC to include some small grants making by Forums with the sorts of criteria and processes reflecting those of the money 4 youth scheme.

Put listings of planned consultation, Scrutiny etc activities on the web-site

Train staff on the strengths and weaknesses of various consultation mechanisms

Use the community to help inform service planning

Use plain English wherever possible. Check it's not only plain but right for different groups by asking Forums etc to check over draft documents e.g. intended for young people.

**4. Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Community Groups? If not, please give details why.**

No. There will also be a need to create safe spaces for particular communities of interest to be able to engage in person too to discuss in more detail issues re disability, sexuality. A structure which has Forums, Neighbourhood Managed Areas and Neighbourhood Partnerships working more closely and awareness of this with NCC across its service areas would be good.

SCTs don't deal with hate crime incidents

Young people are often doing homework etc so can't get to NP meetings and good practice wouldn't tend to put pressure on them to go to NP meetings. (Youth Forum meets times that don't conflict with school demands). They are often at school or at work in the daytime and need to prioritise that over day-time activities. Youth Forum would be pleased to work more with NMAs and NPs in the school holidays e.g. supporting community events.

People reliant on public transport often can't get to and more especially from meetings.

The publicity needs to be improved – we need a communications strategy and local knowledge.

The format of Minutes and Agendas is not a good fit to what engagement is about. We need to think about what readers want and work towards that e.g. putting contact details so that they can find out more and adding follow up right alongside points, or being more like a newsletter, more user-friendly, action points clearly set out.

The annual consultation about meeting dates needs to include not just managers and councillors but also key community organisations to make sure our meetings don't clash with people who we hope will be at them. It may not always be possible but it would be good to aim for a 'best fit' approach.

**In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging**



**with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?**

The Council should be working in the localities and also through town-wide forums to engage effectively with

- Disabled people
- LGB people
- Youth
- Older People (not just existing Pensioners)
- Families (not just women)
- Faith-Based and Ethnic Minority Communities

The inter-faiths forum for the town wants to have more involvement and has asked me to be an NBC link. I would like to do this. It fits well with my other work e.g. re HMD and BME communities.

The forums should be able to work through both public meetings and other means. Communications should include web, email, text, working groups, joint forums activities and linkages to Neighbourhood management/Neighbourhood partnerships. Some small grants funding involvement would be good.

The forums co-ordinator should have capacity to be able to spend more time in the localities and with newer-arrived groups, building up trust and respect and breaking down barriers to do specific pieces of activity and encourage participation in the Forums and Neighbourhood Partnerships.

There should be small grants-funding via forums and neighbourhood partnerships which enables new projects to be set up in localities, thus acknowledging and respecting new and changing potentially unmet needs and also informing us of perceptions of need out in the community.

There should be customer service standards in respect of following up action points from meetings by the officers who attend them and give commitments to do certain things for people.

**Any additional information that you feel would inform the review.**

Improve the way in which meetings are supported to be user-friendlier.

Please change house styles of writing to be more accessible to the community.

Please let the forums have enough budget to be able to do some publicity or consider more activities in localities where transporting things and rental of venues or marquee hire may be issues.

Consider having a store of things we can loan to the community – Youth Forum has

bought a portable stage and PA system which are being loaned out to enable community to put on events. More of this sort of thing could help us to help the community help themselves and build capacity where we can have shared resources.

The Task and Finish Group commented, asked supplementary questions and heard:

- I believe that it would be appropriate for the Chief Executive to ensure that Departmental Service Plans inform and show that consultation has taken place using the range of the council's engagement and consultation mechanisms, and if not why not.
- Documents should be produced in easy to read fonts and styles, in plain English to enable people to participate
- In response to a query regarding ensuring that Forums engage properly, L Ambrose advised that the Youth Forum is working well and suggested it has some good practices and successes that can be drawn on for learning re other engagement. She noted it has representation both from schools and from individuals on behalf of different groups or just as interested individuals.
- Forums and Area Partnerships need to be accessible to people and this could be improved in line with the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Public Engagement Task and Finish Group that concluded its work in 2006, which identified some good ideas such as the production of newsletters rather than formal minutes and the Service Review of autumn 2006.

L Ambrose was commended on her work and thanked for her informative address.

### **(C) MR CHRIS SWINN**

Mr Chris Swinn, Vice Chair N-TACT, addressed the Task and Finish Group. He had previously submitted written evidence to the Group's core questions and asked that a couple of statements that he had made in it be retracted. This was agreed and Mr Swinn's amended evidence is attached at Annex 1 to the minutes.

Mr Swinn then referred to the Council's consultation mechanism. He commented that up until September 2006 citizens had had the right to address Full Council on any agenda item. This right had now been removed. He felt this was undemocratic and unethical. Citizens should have the right to challenge the Administration, which helps to keep checks and balances to any modern democratic society. The public can now only address Full Council on Motions. Mr Swinn felt that many motions were in most cases just statements of fact. Personally, he would want to address Full Council meetings under the agenda item 'Portfolio Holder Presentations' and Policy items. Previously the average number of public speakers at Full Council had been about three and never more than ten compared to the County Council when thirty-five spoke to 'Budget Cuts in Social Care' in 2006.

Mr Swinn felt that the change of the Public Speaking Protocol at Full Council could be a breach of human rights. He asked the Task and Finish Group to consider the Council's Public Speaking Protocol in its work.

He then referred to his written evidence to the Group's core questions, commending

the Public Engagement Task and Finish Group's Focus Group consultation days; adding that participants had received excellent feedback. He added that in his opinion the consultation process for Neighbourhood Management in Castle ward had been extremely poor. He felt that the Council needed to improve the way in which it consults.

Mr Swinn concluded his address by stating that the Council should welcome input from residents and visitors to the town and make information readily available. All information should be published, including 'poor performance' information, such as the CPA progress report.

The Group asked supplementary questions-

**The Constitutional Working Group investigated the business of the Council and its suggestion regarding public speaking was agreed by all Councillors.**

Mr Swinn felt that the public should be given an opportunity to speak on any agenda item and given their permitted three minutes time slot. No citizen should be denied the right and opportunity to speak.

**Would you agree that a number of people have come to Full Council to air their views and this is a failure on the Council's consultation and engagement methods?**

The problem is it needs to be judicious. For judgements to be safe they need to be challenged at every stage of the democratic process. Many Councillors now do not hold surgeries. Area Partnerships were a failure and there is a need for Councillors to engage at 'grass roots level.' Mr Swinn gave an example that in Australia, Street and Precinct Committees are held before the reports are discussed by the Local Council. Full Council is almost the last opportunity for concerned citizens to influence its final decision other than Overview and Scrutiny should there be a need for a 'call in'.

**Is it more a question of who is allowed to speak and does the Constitution allow a comfort zone?**

There has been a problem about the lack of time able to address. Officers and members reports are too often published to the website on the same day and only hours before the meeting. At Mayor Making on 24 May 2007, the Monitoring Officer put Political Structures on the agenda without prior notification and the public had no opportunity to address Full Council because it was 'Invitation Only'. The legal requirement is to publish an agenda five working days prior to the meeting. Mr Swinn gave further examples of late submissions to Cabinet with reports only being made available at the meetings. He felt that if a report was not available at the time of agenda dispatch that it should be deferred to the next meeting.

Mr Swinn was thanked for his address.

**(D) COUNCILLOR DAVID PERKINS - MEMBER OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL WORKING GROUP**

Councillor Perkins was unable to attend to the meeting due to a conflicting engagement and submitted a written response as detailed below: -

The constitutional working party was charged with the responsibility of providing recommendations to update the Council's constitution and was appointed in the light of the "Poor" status given to Northampton Borough Council following the Audit Commissions CPA report in 2004/5. It was acknowledged that part of the problem was to update the workings of Council, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny. Recommendations were made by the working party to council on at least two occasions and accepted with some amendments by council on all occasions. I understand that the new constitution will be issued in its entirety sometime in September.

In considering the workings of Council, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny, one aspect which was discussed at length by the working party was the opportunity of the public to engage with the elected members at these meetings. It was agreed by all the party representatives that democratic engagement was to be encouraged but it was also recognised that in the past the way in which the public had been allowed to engage at these meetings had resulted in meetings being hijacked to the point where the business of the council was being disrupted.

This was particularly true of Council meetings. It was recognised that the authority of the Council had been diminished by repeated meetings where important statutory reports had been tabled for discussion at Council but had either not been discussed or limited discussion had taken place due to lack of time. Quite often the reason for this was that precedence was given to debating political motions rather than the statutory business of Council. The all party working group acknowledged that for the council to improve its "Poor" status it was essential to change the way these meetings were conducted whilst at the same time preserving the right for the community to engage with the elected representatives. The following was therefore agreed:

### ***Council***

1. A half hour slot was to be included at the early part of the Council agenda for the public to put questions to Council. A notice period was required for such questions. If any questions were unanswered at the end of this period a written response was to be provided.
2. Motions would be debated after Council business had been attended too and the public would have the right to speak to motions on giving the appropriate notice.
3. Prior to the Council meeting, if the party whips and leaders agreed that an issue had emerged which was of such interest to the public that to allow it to be debated during a Council meeting would result in insufficient time being available for a) the issue to be aired probably and b) for the Council to conclude its own business, then a separate public meeting would be organised at the earliest possible time to enable the issue to be debated.

### ***Cabinet***

The right of the public to speak at cabinet was retained subject to the appropriate notice being given of the desire to speak. A limit of 3 minutes was given for each speaker.

### ***Overview and Scrutiny***

The right of the public to speak at Overview and Scrutiny was retained. Prior notice is not required and members of the public who wish to speak to the committee would indicate to the chairman.

## **4 FURTHER RESULTS OF DESKTOP RESEARCH**

The Task and Finish Group noted further results of the Scrutiny Officer's desktop research.

Concern was expressed regarding the bad press that Northamptonshire County Council's Public Engagement Strategy had received. Its action plan had reported that the Residents' Panel would be re-launched by July 2007, its Toolkit by August 2007 and a Director would be established by September 2007. However the Residents' Panel had not been re-launched, neither had the Toolkit.

S Wade advised that NBC had had many Citizens' Panels but there was a need to decide seriously how the Council would take the public's views and not just consult to 'tick boxes'.

The Task and Finish Group commented and heard: -

- Citizens' Panels function well when operated in a suitable manner by peer Councils. They can remove a significant knowledge of background complaints.
- There is a need for mechanisms that are not going to make it harder for staff to consult and for people to attend meetings. Issuing consultations at random, for example, to 500 households would produce clean data.
- If an advert goes out asking for 1,000 individuals to make up the Citizens' Panel it is possible that many of these will be regular consultees and attendees at Council meetings. Random consultation would achieve purer responses.
- It would be beneficial to offer incentives for responses.
- One size will not fit all methods of Council consultation. It needs to be ensured that the Council has the ability to use all consultation tools and has a broad approach.
- Citizens' Panels and sampling techniques are very resource intensive. To keep the Panel engaged takes a lot of effort. Without the appropriate software support this can be very difficult.
- There is a need for consideration to be given to linking the Borough's consultations with that of NCC.
- Contracting out to a company to undertake consultation often works well and can be very cost effective, for example providing telephone numbers to a

company who would call and charge 8 pence per 60-second response. This works out cheaper than sending letters out. **This was suggested as a possible recommendation.**

- The budget consultation held during 2006 was very successful as it had been so contentious. The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to challenge the current status quo.

## 5 EXPERT WITNESS RESPONSES

The Task and Finish Group noted further expert witness responses.

### (A) SUMMARY OF WRITTEN EXPERT EVIDENCE RECEIVED

The Task and Finish Group noted the summary of expert witness evidence received.

## 6 SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCLUSION IN THE CHAIR'S REPORT

The Task and Finish Group suggested potential conclusions and recommendations for inclusion in the Chair's final report: - (potential recommendations in bold)

- That all Overview and Scrutiny Review reports be enacted and the recommendations monitored.  
The Scrutiny Officer advised that Overview and Scrutiny has a rigorous monitoring process and the Portfolio Holder is requested to provide a progress report six months after the report has been accepted by Cabinet.
- **That the Task and Finish Group requests that all of the recommendations detailed below are implemented in order that the improvements that this Task and Finish Group seeks can be delivered:**
- **That reports to Full Council and Cabinet contain an implications paragraph on Community Engagement and Consultation.**
- **That Portsmouth City Council's Consultation Toolkit is an example of best practice and Cabinet be asked to consider this document when devising a Consultation Toolkit for the borough.**
- There is a need to find ways to encourage citizens to speak at public Council meetings. The Task and Finish Group challenges the culture and the Council's Constitution in relation to public speaking and how it impacts on the Council's image.
- The Council appears to be in defensive mode and often buries bad news stories rather than publish them. It is acceptable for the Council to report that as an authority it has failed and to accept and acknowledge any mistakes made. **That for the public to be more trusting of the Council, it has to be open and transparent in reporting all of its activities.**
- **That the mechanisms of receiving public feedback be examined and a policy produced. The mechanisms for reporting back from Neighbourhood Management (NMs) need to ensure that information comes back from NMs needs to be reported to the relevant Council departments.**
- **The philosophy of Neighbourhood Management needs to be extended across the whole town. Each area should have its own**

**Communication/Participation Plan that is resourced by the Council. Within this there should be a feedback mechanism.**

- A lot of citizens have expressed concern at the loss of Area Partnerships and there is a need to demonstrate that momentum has not been lost for example Neighbourhood Partnership meetings should be held quarterly. **That Neighbourhood Partnerships be fully resourced in order that their role can be enhanced.**
- **That Parish Councils be contacted and provided with details of the plans for neighbourhood management. It should be stated that where the Council is aware of any overlap of duties and in that area there is an active Parish Council that the Parish Council complies, for example by hosting public meetings. The Council would not wish to be involved but it would need to ensure that Parish Councils sign up to its Protocol if a particular Parish Council did not want a Neighbourhood Partnership within their area.**
- **That it be recognised that the Neighbourhood boundaries are not fixed and may need to be reviewed once sufficient evidence for change is established. These boundaries may change and evolve.**
- **That there be a Policy of Promotion and Attraction for Neighbourhood Management.**
- **That it be ensured that hard to reach groups are engaged with.**
- **That a consultation budget of £ (need figure) be implemented.**
- Contracting out to a company to undertake consultation often works well and can be very cost effective, for example providing telephone numbers to a company who would call and charge 8 pence per 60-second response. This works out cheaper than sending letters out. **That consideration be given to contracting out consultation exercises to external companies to contact random consultees by telephone rather than letter.**

## **7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was none.

## **8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The last meeting was noted as 4 September 2007 commencing at 2pm to finalise the Chair's report.

The meeting concluded at 4:20 pm

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

**Response from Chris Swinn. Vice Chair N-TACT**

**The Science of Citizenship:**

*"In making governance work, you have got to get the physics right – the structures – but you've also got to deal with the chemistry, the emotions involved.*

The Community at large has been disempowered, disenfranchised and disengaged from the paramount and peak decision-making body the Full Council

Community Engagement is about involving the Citizens in decision-making.

First Things First - Change the Council Constitution back to what the Citizens had before September 2006. Allow Public to Address any Agenda Item at Full Council Meetings and return the Power to People to have their say, before it's too late.

Is this Modern 21<sup>st</sup> Century Participatory Democracy?

**Q1) How well do you think the Council consults with you? Please give examples.**

There has been inconsistency from consultation to consultation due to the obvious lack of strategy, protocols and rules of engagement.

I.e. The Ground Rules - The Do's and Don'ts

**Good Consultations: 3 Stars**

- 1) Public Engagement and Communication Task & Finish Group (Simple the Best – Bench Mark
- 2) Budget Consultation 2004 / 2006
- 3) Vision 2035
- 4) Budget Consultation 2006 / 2007

**Fair Consultations: 2 Stars**

- 1) Budget Consultation 2005 / 2006
- 2) Neighbourhood Management Training, Workshop and information Sessions at the Guildhall and Community Forums and Area Partnerships

**Bad / Poor Consultations: 1 Star**

- 1) Housing Options Appraisal 2004 / 2005
- 2) Castle Ward CASPAR 3 + Neighbourhood Management 2005 to present day
- 3) Housing Strategy 2006 to 2011
- 4) BME Housing Strategy

**No Consultation: Nul Point / Zero Star**

- 1) Housing Allocation Policy Interim Changes
- 2) Neighbourhood Partnerships

**Q2) Do you think all Community Groups are adequately consulted? If not, please give details why.**

**No! Officers and Councillors need to get out about more and Listen, Learn, Talk to and Build Trust and Confidence with the Customers, the Citizens of our Great City**

- 1) Consultations tend to be Guildhall centred with same old familiar faces
- 2) We have four District Shopping Centres in Duston, Kingsthorpe, Mereway and Weston Flavell so use them
- 3) Community Centres and Community Rooms are under utilised, so use them.
- 4) Community Notice Boards Install them and then use them
- 5) Communicate – Communicate – Communicate Use the Media Press, Free Press, Radio and TV - All Publicity is good even when its bad – Promote Citizenry and the Council – Attract Citizens and Community Champions - Turn Weaknesses into Strengths and Threats into Opportunities

**Q3) How do you feel the Council's consultation mechanisms could be improved?**

- 1) Develop and Implement, the NBC Community Engagement, Citizens Participation, Communication and Consultation Strategy and Action Plan then Monitor and Review it Quarterly



- 2) **Be Consistent, Open, Transparent and Honest at all Times**
- 3) **Councillors as Paramount Community Leaders need to hold regular rotating weekly Surgeries and Walkabouts with Residents.**
- 4) **Proactively Develop New Residents Associations, Tenants Groups and Community Groups.**
- 5) **Officers to facilitate, Councillors to lead and Citizens to participate**
- 6) **Always summarise plenary sessions, report back to meeting, and wash up meeting and then feedback outputs and outcomes to attendees, post to the NBC Website and issue a Press Release to all Media outlets**

**Q4) Do you feel that the Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Partnership process engages adequately with all Community Groups?  
If not, please give details why.**

**1) Neighbourhood Management Area (NMA) Boards**

**Certainly not! They appear to be officer dominated feudal fiefdoms of self appointed, selected and un-elected members of certain but not all Resident Associations that have no democratic mandate that meet in secret in closed meetings to which the residents at large are not invited.**

**So much for Community Empowerment and Citizen Participation**

**Solution: Directly Elect Resident Representatives every four years to represent suburbs or precincts in the Ward or NMA.**

**Invite all residents at large in the NMA. Hold all monthly NMA meetings in Public**

**See Bristol's 'Community at Heart' @ <http://www.ndcbristol.co.uk/>**

**2) Neighbourhood Partnership (Forums)**

**Whilst they open to all citizens most do not know where and when they meet, so nobody turns up other than Officers and Councillors who always out number those they are suppose to be serving. Only attended by those in the Know, and the great and the good and informed.**

**Solution: Distribute Flyers to promote, attract and actually invite all local residents**

**Q5) In your opinion what Community Groups should the Council be engaging with, in particular how it should engage with new communities not currently represented?**

**1) Hold a Community Engagement Summit at the Guildhall during Local Democracy Week - Invite the leaders of all Residents Associations, Community, National, Ethnic, Ecumenical, Religious and Faith Groups**

**2) Locate and Visit all the meetings of all Community Groups**

**Q6) Any additional information that you feel would inform the review.**

**Establish New Parish or Community Councils in every Ward incorporating the Neighbourhood Management Areas and Partnerships and all they deliver.**

**"Participation is the key to Community Harmony"**