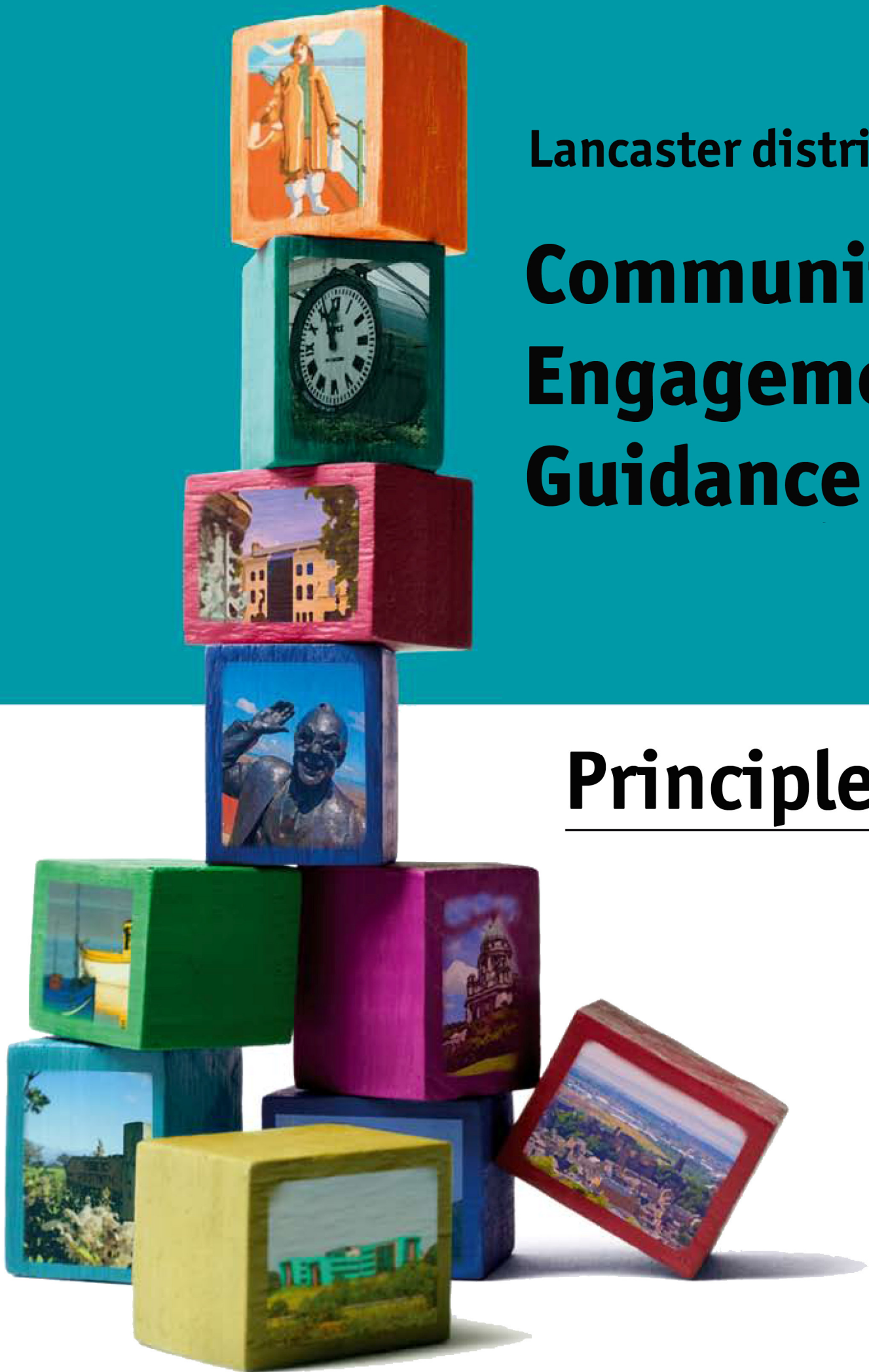


Lancaster district

Community Engagement Guidance

Principles



Introduction

Community engagement is important to encourage people to share their views, influence decisions and ultimately play an active role in shaping future service delivery in the Lancaster District.

This can help local organisations to understand user needs and priorities to enable them to provide the right services and continuously improve to meet changing needs of people within the district.

However, it is important to plan and manage consultations effectively otherwise they can influence public confidence and unrealistically raise public expectations of local services.

This guidance provides service local organisations with a set of principles and step by step approach to planning engagement. It also provides a toolkit to assist with engaging with seldom heard groups and a range of methods.

Lancaster District Community Engagement Group

The Lancaster District Community Engagement Group aims to improve the co-ordination, quality and effectiveness of community engagement in the Lancaster District.

The purpose of the group is collectively to (In line with the Lancaster District Community Engagement Guidance):

- Improve co-ordination of engagement across the district to help to reduce duplication and consultation fatigue
- Improve opportunities for local people to engage with services
- Identify opportunities for joint working
- Share lessons learnt/best practice
- Celebrate good practice
- Share resources including support

What is community engagement?

Community engagement can mean different things to different people. One definition for Community Engagement is:

'The involvement of citizens, through locally based representative bodies and individually, in influencing and shaping those decisions which directly impact on their local environment and the quality of their daily life'.

Aim of Community Engagement Guidance

The aim of this guidance is to set out clear principles for community engagement in the Lancaster district to provide guidance for organisations so they can engage collaboratively with communities, to use results of this engagement to develop more responsive policies and to deliver improvements in services.

Objectives

Through the Community Engagement Guidance, there should be:

1. A clear understanding of and commitment to community engagement;
2. Opportunities for communities to shape and influence the development and delivery of quality services, and policies that reflect local needs and priorities;
3. Tools in the guidance are for local organisations to use as good practice in community engagement activities;
4. Community engagement is carried out in a way that is timely, transparent, honest, and accessible to all, and is carried out in a co-ordinated and consistent approach;
5. Relevant engagement proportionate to issues and likely benefits;
6. Sufficient information provided to the communities to enable them to participate meaningfully in the community engagement;
7. Feedback provided to the communities about the way their participation shaped the decisions made.

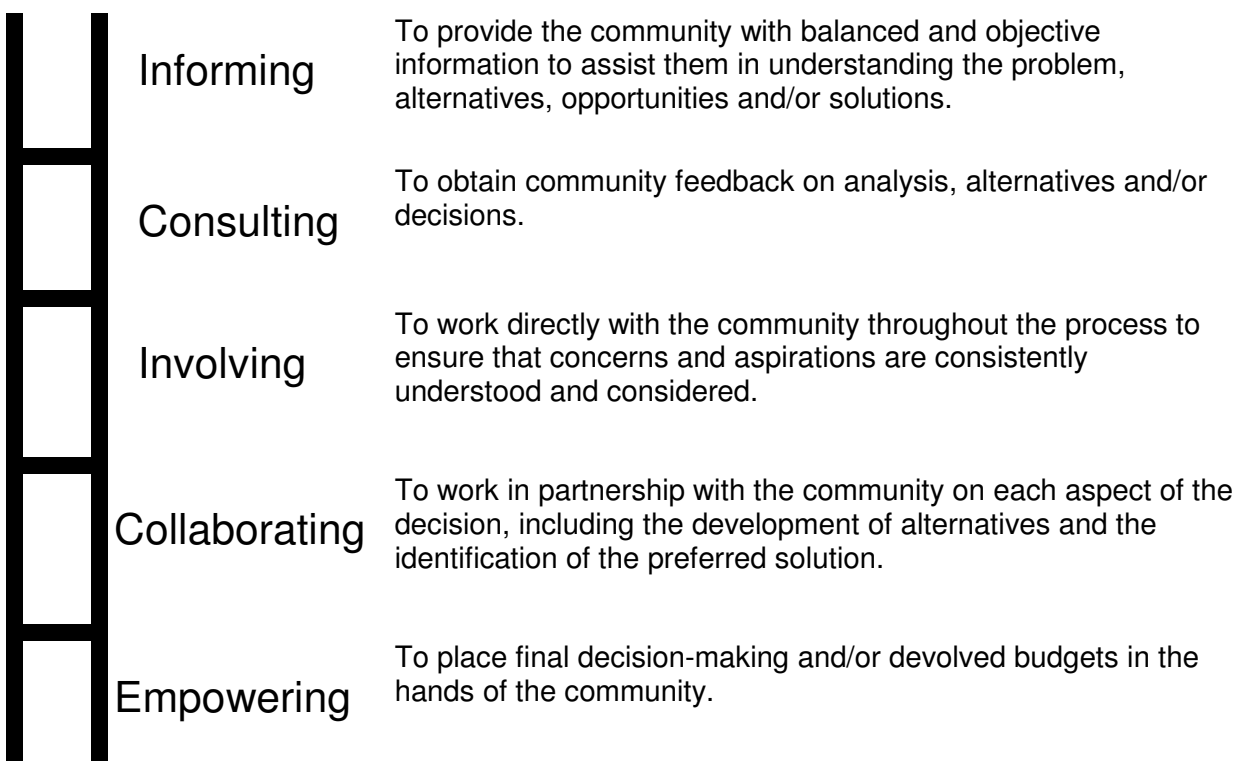
Types of community engagement

There are many different words used to describe community engagement – ‘participation’, ‘involvement’, ‘consultation’ and ‘research’ are just a few and they are often used interchangeably.

Within these guidelines the word ‘participation’ means that the community is actively taking part in one of the five engagement levels described below.

When planning and carrying out engagement activities in the Lancaster district, local organisations should include one or more of following types of engagement from the below described ladder of participation and provide necessary support to enable engagement.

The ‘**ladder of participation**’ model suggests that there are different engagement levels.



(www.peopleandparticipation.net, 2012)

Why is engagement important?

- The community has the right to influence and participate in the planning and delivery of services and decisions that affect them;
- Community engagement can improve working relationships between local organisations, and the relationship between local organisations and their service users;
- Local organisations including the Voluntary, Community, Faith Sector (VCFS) can strengthen their role in community leadership;
- Potential issues arising from proposed changes to services can be identified and addressed;
- User satisfaction with services can be monitored over time;
- Services can be targeted more closely on providing what people want and need; and supports better equality and diversity.

Results of community engagement

- A clearer picture of need and aspirations of Lancaster district communities:
- By having a clearer picture the right approach can be used to engage the whole community:
- Community engagement can promote civic pride, pride of place and good relationships which all contribute to community cohesion:
- People will be able to transfer the skills and experience they gain from participating in community engagement activities to other aspects of their life:
- When people feel they are involved and listened to, health and well being can improve particularly mental health and happiness:
- Local people will know how they can get involved and will feel that organisations are listening; and
- If knowledge is power then informing communities is an empowering activity.

What is a community?

Communities can be best defined as groups of people with something in common. These can be:

Community of place

People living in a neighbourhood and localities such as housing estates or villages. These locations will usually have defined physical boundaries.

Community of interest

A group of people with a shared interest or experience, which might cut across other communities. A community of interest includes service users (for example, people interested in climate change, members of a disability support group, patients registered with a particular GP, library users, pupils of a school).

Community of identity

A group of people with something in common - how people identify themselves or how they are identified by society, usually by demographic characteristics (age; disability; ethnicity; faith; gender; sexual orientation and transgender).

A person will usually see themselves as belonging to a number of communities. This means that communities can be very diverse and consideration must be given when approaching different communities. Some people may feel that they are not part of a community regardless of sharing some of the above characteristics. A lack of identity with a particular community should not result in exclusion from the decision making process affecting that community.

In summary, local organisations are encouraged to engage with people:

- Regardless of the communities they belong to.
- Wherever such engagement has the potential, subject to cost considerations, to improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of the district.

Lancaster District Community Engagement Principles

A number of community engagement commitments have been developed to make sure all community engagement and consultation activity follows good practice. Local organisations should follow these when conducting all consultation/community engagement work.

Clarity of Purpose	Before beginning any engagement activity, it will be clear why it is happening, what it will achieve, who is involved, what the community can and cannot influence, and how the information gathered through the engagement activity is going to be used.
Evidence Base	Relevant available research, knowledge and community intelligence will be used to help plan engagement activities. Engagement activities won't be carried out if the information is already available.
Proportionate	The approach to engagement and resources will be proportionate to the issue and likely benefits within the resources that partner services have.
Communication	Communication will be tailored by using a variety of accessible and inclusive ways to promote and provide information on engagement opportunities to communities.
Timing	Sufficient time will be allowed to design and carry out engagement activities that are inclusive and encourage participation from all relevant communities. How the information shapes the future of services must also have a realistic time frame.
Partnership	There will be a co-ordinated approach to information provision, consultation, involvement, shared relevant information and intelligence. This will avoid duplication of effort and reduce consultation fatigue.
Integrity	There will be a culture of openness, honesty and accountability when engaging with communities, it is important not to raise unrealistic expectations.
Inclusive	The best and most appropriate methods of engaging with communities will be used to make sure as many people as possible are involved. No one must be left out by design.
Action	Where possible action will be taken on the results of engaging communities. Where it is not possible sound reasons will be fed back to communities.
Feedback	Inclusive and accessible feedback to the community will be provided about the engagement activities carried out and will explain how the community's input contributed to the decision-making process. Feedback will be built into the whole process from the start.
Monitoring & Review	Engagement activities will be monitored and reviewed and reported on periodically to the community.