



EAST RIDING  
OF YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

# Community Engagement and Consultation Policy

**2008**



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## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION POLICY

<b>Lead Directorate and Service:</b>	<b>Corporate Policy and Strategy - Communications</b>
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### I. Background

The previous Corporate Consultation Policy and Strategy was approved in July 2004. Since then there has been significant change in the approach for seeking the public's views, and a move from 'consultation' to 'engagement'. The policy and strategy has been re-visited to ensure that it recognises the changing environment. This policy does not apply to those circumstances where a specific form of consultation is prescribed or is being conducted in accordance with National or other guidelines, for example in the Planning and Development Control process.

The strategic or 'place-shaping' role of local authorities has gained greater prominence with the proposed introduction of the Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA). These will replace the current Comprehensive Performance Assessment regime. The CAA places greater emphasis on the community leadership role of the Council and the role of local Ward Members in leading the communities that they represent.

The Local Government White Paper : Stronger and Prosperous Communities - November 2007 emphasises the Council's 'duty to involve' residents and other stakeholders in the planning and delivery of services for their communities and local areas. There is also a greater emphasis on the importance of working with partners and other community and voluntary groups to provide this engagement, whilst working towards Local Area Agreement (LAA) requirements. The White Paper describes the purpose of community engagement as :

*“to give local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives. It is about creating strong, prosperous communities and delivering better public services through a rebalancing of the relationship between central government, local government and local people.”*

The key priorities in the White Paper are :

- A co-ordinated approach to engagement: sharing resources and best practice, avoiding duplication and overload.
- Working at the local level to identify local needs and providing consistent service delivery.

- Empowering communities to play an active role in the shaping of future services they receive.
- Innovation as part of the approach to planning and investing in services and communities. Effective and efficient services achieved through good policy planning, financial planning and overall performance management.
- Sustainability underpinning the approach to securing social, economic and environmental benefits for the future, and helping to inform our improvement planning process.

The IDeA Peer Group Review undertaken in October 2007 identified that “More effective community engagement and responsiveness to local areas are additional aspects of place shaping and the community leadership agenda”.

A review of Area Forums has now taken place against this emerging picture and this has coincided with the decision of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to pursue the development of a new multi-agency approach to locality based working in the East Riding.

## Links with Corporate Priorities

### The Council’s Vision

**The East Riding of Yorkshire Council will work to improve the QUALITY of life for our community, earn the RESPECT of the people we serve and build PRIDE in belonging to the East Riding.**

The East Riding of Yorkshire Council and partners will consult appropriately with residents, businesses, partner bodies and other stakeholders and will use the results of engagement activities to inform its decision-making process, to develop and refine its policies and to help drive improvement in the service it provides.

This policy links to all of the seven Corporate Priorities, as it deals with understanding the experience of all services, as well as promoting ways of working that minimise the potential for duplication of effort. In particular, it refers directly to the Corporate Priority : Local Problem Solving, as well as the Striding Ahead theme - Engaging with Our Residents and Communities.

The East Riding of Yorkshire covers an extensive area of 240,768 hectares (930 square miles) and has a population of 330,900 (Office of National Statistics Mid-year estimate June 2006) - just 1.4 people per hectare. Priorities will vary from area to area and this is particularly important because of the diverse character and separate and distinct communities within the East Riding. The diverse and dispersed nature of the population needs to be taken into account in developing the community engagement model.

## 2. Definitions for the Purposes of this Policy

### Community Engagement

In the East Riding context it is suggested that community engagement means the process of engaging, consulting and involving local people in tackling local issues aimed at improving the quality of life of our communities including:

- the engagement of local communities in planning, development and monitoring of local services and their quality delivered by the Council and its LSP partners
- solving local community problems
- giving local people a voice in decisions affecting them.

To be effective community engagement has to be a two way process of communication between the Council and its partners and the public, either as individuals or as a community, on key issues affecting them. The community leadership role of Council Ward Members is key to making this work.

Community Engagement is about empowering communities by providing them with opportunities to have a voice about what they want in terms of service delivery for their community and local area, and providing them with mechanisms to help them to solve local problems.

### Consultation

Consultation is a one-way process between the Council, or the LSP, and its customers. Consultation asks people to express views by responding to communications in whatever form (electronic, face-to-face, telephone, postal). It does not involve any two-way process.

### Community Empowerment

Community Empowerment is working with communities to give them the opportunities, skills and confidence to help to shape the services that are provided to them.

### Community Cohesion

Community Cohesion is about the relationships between and within communities - the Communities and Local Government office defines it as : “Community Cohesion incorporates and goes beyond the concept of race equality and social inclusion”.

The Home Office has developed the following definition of a cohesive community :

- There is a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities ;
- The diversity of people’s different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued ;
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities ; and
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

## 3. Policy Statement

**The East Riding of Yorkshire Council will work with its LSP partners to develop methods of community engagement and consultation that will create an environment where the public, including those groups that are ‘hard-to-hear’, can be involved in decisions that affect the services that they receive, and the communities in which they live.**

This policy makes reference to working with its public sector partners, but deals solely with the Council's approach. Each Primary Care Trust has its own legal duties for consultation and engagement. Where the policy refers to the intentions of partners, it is written in the spirit of the Councils' understanding of partners' current intentions.

**The Council's community engagement and consultation work will be :**

- **Inclusive**
- **Neutral**
- **Accountable**
- **Appropriate**
- **Useable**
- **Confidential**
- **Rigorous**
- **Proportionate**
- **Timely**
- **Meaningful**

## **4. Corporate Requirements**

### **Corporate Priorities**

Community Engagement and Consultation activity informs the assessment and development of all services, and therefore contributes to the delivery of the following Corporate Priorities :

- **Safer communities** – a safe place to work, rest and play.
- **Valuing our environment** – a green and sustainable future.
- **Local problem solving** – local solutions to local problems.
- **Reducing inequalities** – better life chances and choices for all.
- **Revitalising our communities** – regeneration for a bright future.
- **Retaining the East Riding character** – building on what makes our area a great place to live.
- **Supporting vulnerable people** – protecting from harm, promoting independence.

In addition, through the effective co-ordination and management of community engagement and consultation activity, it contributes to the Council's aim of being a Well-Managed Authority.

### **Community Cohesion**

By providing opportunities for decisions that affect the community, the Council will encourage the development of a common vision. Further, by creating opportunities to come together to discuss issues of relevance to them, the Council will build on and develop a sense of belonging. The Council will also support the LSP's Community Cohesion Forum.

### **Sustainable Community Plan - Our East Riding 2006-16**

The findings from the community engagement and consultation work, including the LSP's annual Riding Around exercise, will be used to inform the Sustainable Community Plan and monitor changing priorities.

### **Crime and Disorder Act 1998 – Section 17**

The range of community engagement and consultation activities will include issues that deal with crime and disorder reduction.

## Equalities and Inclusiveness

The Council values the views of all its residents equally, and will ensure that all community engagement and consultation activities takes into account the differing accessibility needs of all, regardless of colour, culture or ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, gender, disability, age, sexuality, geographical location or any other status.

The Council's approach will be sensitive to the needs, values, language and cultural differences that exist within its community and will make materials, and opportunities to participate, available in other formats where reasonable and appropriate. The Council will follow best practice guidance on clear print.

The Council will respect the particular needs of groups that are difficult to engage and will make reasonable efforts to ensure inclusive approaches in its consultation processes, especially where it believes that the views of a group may differ from that of the wider population, where the impact of the issue being consulted on will be different, or where particular importance attaches to the inclusion of specific hard-to-hear groups.

The Council recognises that its own workforce, and LSP partners, are also members of the community, because they either live or work in the East Riding, and can be used directly as consultees. However, the Council recognises that employees may express views on topics that take into account their own knowledge and experience of service delivery, and will take this into account when interpreting responses.

## Human Rights Act

The Council will ensure that the individual's right to confidentiality / protection of personal information complies with the requirements of Article 8 - Rights to respect for family life, and will not disclose personal information in contravention of relevant legislation.

## Rural Proofing

The Council will ensure that, in carrying out community engagement and consultation, it bears in mind the need to consider different approaches for urban and rural areas. In addition, the analysis of results will be carried out using a range of socio-demographic / economic bases.

## Sustainability

The Council will ensure that electronic methods of communication will be used, wherever practicable, to reduce the use of paper. Where materials are required to be used, they will be derived, so far as is practicable, from sustainable sources. Where possible, paper use will be minimised by duplex copying. Where paper is used, it will be fed back into the recycling stream once it is no longer required. Meetings and events will be arranged to minimise the need for travel.

## 5. Policy Development including Consultation

The policy has been developed by the Council's Local Engagement Team, in consultation with all services through their Head of Service, and by members of the Council's Corporate Management Team. It has also been discussed with :

- The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement.

- The East Riding of Yorkshire Primary Care Trust.
- The Humberside Police Authority and Humberside Police.
- The Humberside Fire and Rescue Service.
- The LSP Board and LSP Manager.

## 6. Links with other Policies

Any community engagement or consultation may deal with issues that are covered by other policies - they must therefore be borne in mind during the development of the work. Within that overall environment, the most relevant policies are :

- The Corporate Equalities Policy ;
- The Communications Strategy.

There may also be occasions when, in developing projects with public sector partners, their own policies may become relevant.

Health and Safety Policies will apply to all work, with particular need to consider safe working practice for Lone Workers.

## 7. Desirable Outcomes

### Overall Aims and Objectives

The Community Engagement and Consultation Policy will ensure that residents, partners and other key stakeholders in the East Riding are given the opportunity to influence the planning and delivery of services for their communities and local area. This will include :

- Ensuring that throughout the Council there is a clear understanding of, and commitment to, engaging with communities about decisions affecting their lives.
- Working with LSP partners to encourage them to ensure that their staff also have a clear understanding of, and commitment to, engaging with communities about decisions affecting their lives.
- Establishing a co-ordinated and consistent approach to community engagement and consultation in the East Riding aimed at better aligning the service delivery of both East Riding of Yorkshire Council and partner agencies.
- Sharing resources and avoiding duplication by drawing upon expertise within LSP partners, including East Riding of Yorkshire Council's Local Engagement Team.
- Ensuring wide-reaching community engagement by developing opportunities for all residents and stakeholders in the East Riding that will :
  - Provide opportunities to share their views ;
  - Build confidence that these views will be listened to ;
  - Ensure that there is good feedback about the findings ;
  - Make sure that the outcomes from engagement activities are fed back to the community ;
  - Generate feedback mechanisms between partner agencies on the outcomes of all engagement and consultation activity ;
  - Involve residents in seeking local solutions to local problems.
- Sharing good practice and information across all partner agencies.
- Creation of an explicit link between all partners within the LSP discussion process.

- Work alongside established groups at a local level to improve service delivery at grass-root levels.
- Support community groups, town and parish councils, and other interested parties in their active involvement in their community.
- Provide a channel that allows local people to have a say on, work with and take ownership of solutions to local issues that affect their quality of life.
- Provide local community capacity to manage their own community issues.

## Community Engagement

Consultation and community engagement are at the heart of local government's role in championing the needs of its communities and democratic renewal. It is important that stakeholders are involved in developing the direction and policies of the organisation as well as the services it provides. The community leadership role of Ward Members is key to making this work.

## Joined-up Working

The increasing pressure on all public organisations to consult and engage with stakeholders has led to a rise in the number of surveys, engagement groups and other consultation and engagement methods in recent years. There is a need to ensure co-ordination of both community engagement and consultation both within and between organisations to avoid 'consultation fatigue' within the community. This partnership approach will help to ensure that the return from the investment in community engagement and consultation is maximised.

The Council will discuss our proposals for community engagement and consultation, both internally and with public-sector partners, providing the following benefits :

- Improved co-ordination ;
- Reduction of duplication ;
- Co-operation with public-sector partners ;
- Opportunities for streamlining of projects ;
- Early recognition of potential impacts upon funding ;
- Early identification of opportunities for engagement, as distinct from consultation ;
- Agreeing local priority outcomes.

## Information Sharing

The Council will ensure that the findings of community engagement and consultation are made available not only to those who took part, but also, where relevant and appropriate, to its public-sector partners.

## Meaningful Engagement and Consultation

The Council will continue to operate processes that assess that, before any community engagement or consultation takes place, the services that are involved have the capacity to respond to the findings. The Council will not seek involvement on issues that it is not in a position to change, or raise expectations about things that are not achievable. The Council will make sure that, when proposals are made at 'blue-sky' events, it explains when it cannot consider some or all ideas that are raised because of limitations on resources, or legal reasons.

## Existing Community Groups

The Council recognises that there are existing groups that represent communities of interest and will seek to use these groups to ensure engagement. This will be balanced against the need to ensure that these groups do not 'hijack' issues and present a view that may not be representative of the views of the general population. The Council will work together with town and parish councils to build upon their links with communities to improve community engagement.

## Neighbourhoods, Localities and Communities

The public often see the issues that affect them in terms of their own 'neighbourhood' - other words used are locality and community. However, these can be difficult to define, particularly with a dispersed rural community like that of the East Riding. Areas with no physical boundaries, such as neighbourhoods or housing estates, can define neighbourhoods / localities / communities. They can also be defined by a group with a common interest or belief, such as religious groups, or by a common demographic characteristic, such as young people and Ethnic Minority groups.

## Hard-to-Hear Groups

It was once thought that some groups are hard-to-reach : instead it is more useful to think of them as hard-to-hear, and that it has to be recognised that specific measures may be necessary to ensure that they can be heard. In a national context, the following groups have been considered to be potentially hard-to-hear :

- Ethnic minority communities
- Gay and lesbian groups
- Travellers
- People in custody
- Children and young people
- Disaffected young people
- Young working men
- Faith communities
- Very old people
- Migrant workers
- Young people not in education, employment or training (NEETS)
- Students in Higher Education
- People with learning disabilities
- People with sensory disabilities

The Council will ensure that the involvement of these groups is appropriate for each issue, but will also be mindful that it must avoid the domination of individual groups, or those represented by those who are more articulate.

## 8. Policy Implementation

Some service areas have established, agreed, and / or statutory consultation processes - for example : Planning and Development Control and Forward Planning. They may be required to follow prescribed consultation channels. These processes follow established timetables and procedures working to national guidance, with specific audiences and groups. This policy does not apply to those circumstances.

## Community Engagement

The Council will establish links with a range of community groups and public sector bodies and work with Ward Members to ensure that a wide range of community representation is given opportunity to take part in community engagement and consultation activity. This will include

established links such as : the Sustainable Communities Network ; Rural Partnerships ; Parish and Area Liaison Teams ; Neighbourhood Action Teams ; and all other partner agency links.

## Joined-up Working

The Council will establish communication channels with the full range of public-sector partners, making sure that they are briefed on planned community engagement and consultation activities and work with them to encourage their involvement.

All community engagement and consultation activity with the public, or town and parish councils, will be registered and discussed with the Local Engagement Team. This approach will bring several benefits :

- The expertise available within the Team will improve the quality of consultation and generate more reliable results.
- The Council will ensure that its survey work follows good practice in methodology, sampling and questionnaire design, and contributes to the positive and professional image that the Council wishes to convey.
- The Team can prevent over-surveying of particular groups, such as town and parish councils or the Council's own staff, and advise on timetabling to avoid clashes or unnecessary delays in responding.
- Services can access other consultation processes such as the annual Household Survey or the SaySomething website, which may allow them to carry out their work more effectively and at reduced cost.
- Services, and our partners, will be able to access a central database of ongoing community engagement and consultation activity within the East Riding.

Services will provide relevant information to the Local Engagement Team to allow them to maintain a project database of community engagement and consultation activity within the East Riding. The Team will encourage our public-sector partners to contribute to this database.

To ensure that contact with schools is co-ordinated to take into account peaks in workload, all proposals for consultation will be discussed with the Research and Information service within the Children, Family and Adult Services Directorate, except for consultations that are required to meet statutory requirements or are based upon established / long-standing arrangements.

## Information Sharing

The Council will make the findings of its public community engagement and consultation available not only to those who took part, but also, where relevant and appropriate, to its partners. This will include, where appropriate :

- Direct feedback to those who took part ;
- Articles in the local press / town and parish council newsletters ;
- Web-based information and reports.

The processes will include monthly reporting to each Director and their management team. Further, these teams will be encouraged to ensure that this information is passed down through their own management structures, to ensure that learning is distributed as widely as is practicable. The Council will also share information about the findings of community engagement and consultation with our LSP partners.

The Council will publish examples of where community engagement and consultation have resulted in change to the way services are delivered to the local communities.

When the Council has taken part in public community engagement and consultation in partnership with others, it will agree the mechanisms for feedback with its partners.

### Meaningful Engagement and Consultation

Processes may vary from service to service, but they will be encouraged to develop authorisation protocols that demonstrate that senior managers are satisfied that the services that are involved have the capacity to respond to the findings. Further, these processes will ensure that funding streams have been considered, both in the short- and long-term. This will be particularly relevant where the source of funding impacts on capital or revenue planning that is handled outside the service.

When carrying out surveys, the Council's normal basis for sampling will be based on best practice advice. Where appropriate, this will be the requirement to achieve 95% confidence that the results of a sample survey are within an error ratio of  $\pm 3\%$  of the wider "population" from which the sample is drawn. Where this is not practically achievable, the variability of the findings will be borne in mind when formulating responses to the findings.

The Council will follow best practice in all its consultation processes, ensuring adherence to the appropriate quality standards for any given piece of work. The Council will also follow and adhere to established ethical practice in the conduct and dissemination of research. Specifically, it will normally follow the Market Research Society's **Code of Practice and Guidance** and / or the Social Research Association's **Ethical Guidelines**.

The Council will consider a range of established techniques to ensure that community engagement and consultation is effective, including : Riding Around ; On the Road Events ; Neighbourhood Action Team forums ; and town and parish council meetings. It will also bear the full range of engagement techniques that have been developed, such as 'Planning for Real', 'Participatory Appraisal', and focus groups. Where necessary, the Council will commission third-party organisations with particular expertise or contacts, to deliver community engagement and consultation activities.

### Hard-to-Hear Groups

For each community engagement or consultation activity, the Council will consider which groups need to be specifically targeted to ensure that their views are heard. Where events are held, the Council will make sure that they have considered the needs of those attending, so that they can enable them to take an active part wherever practicable. Where this proves impractical, the Council will make alternative arrangements to ensure that they have a representative range of involvement.

The Council will ensure that the requirements of the Disability and Discrimination Act are complied with. This will include ensuring that appropriate methods of communication are used, that may include leaflets in other languages, talking books and other materials that should be used as a matter of good practice. The use of interpreters or signers should be considered for public meetings, workshops, and community gatherings.

## **Protection of Personal Data**

The Council will ensure compliance with current data protection legislation about the holding and use of personal data. It will use only the personal data supplied by individuals who have given the Council permission to contact them.

The Council will only retain any personal information for as long as it needs to, either for analysis of the findings or for retention for the purposes of audit of the results.

## **9. Resource / Financial Implications**

Effective community engagement and consultation will require adequate resources, both in financial terms and the personnel to deliver this engagement.

When commissioning work the Council will work with its own services and LSP partners to explore joint commissioning arrangements that make the best use of available resources. In addition, the Council will work with LSP Partners to share each other's resources to deliver community engagement and consultation.

## **10. Evaluation**

The policy as a whole will be included in the two-yearly review programme.

## **11. References**

White Paper : Strong and Prosperous Communities

White Paper : Local Government Involvement in Public Health

White Paper : Unlocking the Talent of our Communities

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