

local leadership academy



neighbourhood and community engagement

member workbook

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foreword

This workbook has been designed as a learning aid for elected members. It makes no judgement about whether you have been a member for some time, or whether you have been elected more recently. If you fall into the former category the workbook should serve as a useful reminder of some of the key skills, approaches and tactics involved in neighbourhood & community engagement - it may even challenge you to reconsider how you have approached aspects of the role to date.

Those members who are new to local government will recognise that they have much to learn. The workbook will help you to get up to speed on the main areas of the neighbourhood & community engagement role that require focus and attention. In effect, it should provide you with some pointers on how to develop a style and approach that you are comfortable with, and that enables you to be most effective in your day to day duties.

The workbook offers few firm rules for ward members as it is recognised that each individual must decide how best to approach the role. This will be influenced by the other commitments in your life, the type of ward you represent and the methods and approaches that suit you best. There is no presumption about 'typical wards' or 'typical members' and the workbook should serve more as a direction marker rather than a road map.

In practical terms, the document will take between **two to three hours** to work through. You do not need to complete it all in one session and may prefer to work through the material at your own pace. The key requirement is to think about your own approach to neighbourhood & community engagement – how the material relates to your local situation, the people you serve and the council you represent.

introduction

In working through the material contained in this workbook you will encounter a number of features designed to help you think about your role within the planning system. These features are represented by the symbols shown below:



guidance – this is used to indicate guidance, research, quotations, explanations and definitions that you may find helpful.



challenges – these are questions or queries raised in the text which ask you to reflect on your role or approach – in essence, they are designed to be thought-provokers.



case studies – these are ‘pen pictures’ of approaches used by members elsewhere to illustrate how others have tackled the role.



hints and tips – these represent a selection of good practices which you may find useful.



useful links – these are signposts to sources of further information, outside of the workbook, which may help with principles, processes, methods and approaches. A full list of useful additional information is also set out in the appendix of the workbook.

communities and councillors

a new localism

The responsibilities of your council fall into two main areas:

- 1 Making sure that people receive high-quality public services;
- 2 Providing leadership to local communities.

In recent years, greater attention has been given to the involvement of community leaders, voluntary groups, neighbourhood residents and civic associations in council policy decisions which affect their lives and in the design and delivery of better public services. This is often referred to as 'the new localism' and is designed to broaden democratic participation and contribute to more effective neighbourhood management and sustainable communities. The way that councils involve local people in decision making and service improvement is often known as neighbourhood & community engagement.

In this context, the terms 'neighbourhood' and 'community' are used in a broad sense to mean one or more of the following:

General or specific geographical areas that are defined as workplaces or categorised by their residential nature, e.g. an area with a defined population size, a single housing estate, a block of streets within a ward area.

Groups of people defined by the areas they live or work in, e.g. ward constituents or the 'community' of individual towns and villages.

Groups of people defined by something other than their residential or workplace environments, i.e. communities defined on the grounds of race, colour, age, class, faith, disability or sexuality.

Every neighbourhood or community is made up of different individuals and groups, whose particular views, interests and ambitions may often be at odds and may not always be reconcilable. This is not a reason for ignoring the importance of neighbourhood & community engagement, but is the very real challenge which you will face in getting people more actively involved in issues affecting their well-being.



"By engaging with local people and seeing them as partners, many local authorities are already achieving far-reaching and sustained improvements in the quality of local services and neighbourhoods"

Local Government White Paper, 'Strong and Prosperous Communities', 2006

? engaging with local people - who are you talking about and talking to?

Think about your specific ward area. What neighbourhoods and communities are you serving as a community leader?

General or specific geographical areas:

Groups of people defined by the area in which they live or work:

Groups of people defined by something other than their residential or workplace environments:

Look again at your list. Have you included what people sometimes refer to as 'seldom heard' or 'hard to reach' groups in the community, e.g. particular groups of older, younger or disabled people or specific minority ethnic groups? What about transitory or newly arriving communities, e.g. commuters, travellers, migrant workers, refugees or asylum seekers?

Ward members are in the front line of neighbourhood & community engagement. As a community leader, you are best placed to understand the particular challenges faced by your neighbourhoods. And working with communities and other local partners, you can help to decide how best to respond.

It is only at a local level that problems such as access to social housing, crime, deprivation and anti-social behaviour can be understood and addressed. Few other community leaders have the mandate to co-ordinate different interests, reconcile diverse views and encourage open debate and dialogue in the way that you can.

The particular strengths and knowledge you bring to this engagement process are:

- **An understanding of your ward** – the demographics, the key issues facing local people and the way that services are being delivered.
- **The representation of local voices** – you are a channel of communication between the communities you serve and the council, representing the views of others and speaking up for the unheard.
- **Communicating and influencing skills** – you can help to ensure that the views of local people are taken into account when decisions are made by the council or outside bodies and matters are reported in the media.

All of this can provide you with a strong basis on which to act for or in support of local people, ie:

- You can assess whether there is general satisfaction with council services (and those of other agencies) and whether local people believe they are getting best value from the money being spent.
- You can speak with confidence on behalf of your neighbourhoods or communities when issues affecting them are debated or decisions need to be taken.
- You can promote partnership working between public, private and voluntary organisations in response to recognised community needs.
- You can support community calls for action and promote self-help among your constituents by understanding their aims, aspirations, views and tactics.

However, neighbourhood & community engagement will require you to do more than just represent the views of local people. You will need to encourage people to play a more active role themselves in the decision making processes of the council.



"Elected councillors [are] the leading advocates for their communities"

'Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matters', ODPM, 2005



Neighbourhood and community engagement in Hillingdon

"Locally, I sit on the Ickenham Safer Neighbourhood Team ward panel. Councillors don't have a vote, but we listen to the concerns of local residents' associations. They are particularly anxious about anti-social behaviour and intimidating groups of young people hanging around. They told us they wanted Mosquitos – sonic teenager deterrents that emit a high pitched noise only audible to adolescents. We went to our community safety team and got 16 of these devices to give to shopkeepers and other residents to install in places where youths congregate. I have also got money from Hillingdon's community safety budget to fund CCTV in the area."

Councillor David Simmons, London Borough of Hillingdon

ways that members can encourage greater engagement

In your day to day role as a ward member you may already carry out lots of activities that help to encourage citizens and communities to get more involved in the decision making processes of your council, e.g. providing information through the press or media, holding meetings with community groups or raising awareness of relevant issues through posters or leaflet drops.

You may also conduct advice surgeries or make use of information and communications technology to ensure that opportunities for engaging with local people are maximised, e.g. the use of a weblog, or 'blog', as an online journal, to let people know essential information and to solicit responses from your constituents via e-mail and online surveys.

However, not everyone will want to participate to the same extent. While some people will want to engage with you and actively participate in a dialogue about their issues and concerns, others will be content to let you represent their interests or just keep them informed about what is going on locally. Much of this will depend on each person's perception of 'authority' figures generally, and their receptiveness to direct engagement (see diagram below). This means you will have to adopt a range of approaches to suit the issue and the perceptions of the local community.

The other factors that you will need to consider in encouraging greater engagement from citizens and communities are:

- Who best to engage with, i.e. all constituents, or targeted groups that have a particular interest or stake in the issues concerned. As part of this, you may also need to consider the risks involved in not engaging with some community groups.
- The usefulness and applicability of different engagement techniques given the individuals or communities concerned, e.g. using a postal questionnaire survey may not be the best way to solicit responses from some communities that are distrustful or fearful of officialdom.
- The ease of accessibility and cost justification for engaging with the community concerned. Any engagement activity should be economic, efficient and effective, but also user-friendly, and any costs involved should be commensurate with the resources at stake in any decision making process.

* some further ideas for engaging people

Surveys and questionnaires – can be paper-based or sent by e-mail.

Focus groups – get a selection of people together to debate a specific issue.

Roadshow – take your views out into the community and seek people's opinions.

Community newsletters – produce a local newsletter and ask for feedback.

Blogging – create your own website of news, views and information with an e-mail address for responses.

towards community engagement

the benefits of neighbourhood and community engagement

Increasing the engagement and participation of citizens and communities in local government planning and decision making can produce benefits for all concerned. This is illustrated in the table below:

council	community	citizens
Can help to ensure better congruence between the council's 'vision' and what happens in practice.	Can help to improve the democratic accountability of councils to their communities.	Should engender a sense of involvement and participation in decision making.
Decision making should be based on representative views – greater engagement can help to supply this.	Increases the representation of the community and can help to identify community leaders.	Can help to ensure representation for groups which are often marginalised or 'hard to reach' in the community.
A broad process of neighbourhood & community engagement can help to reduce the influence of pressure groups and single issue politics.	Can help to improve the community's understanding of the business of local government.	Can help to empower stakeholders and increase citizen control of local affairs.
Can help to improve feedback on strategic proposals and generate new ideas for consideration by the council.	Can help to ensure that strategies and plans are developed which take account of local social, economic and environmental factors.	Can help to engage citizens in the resolution of their own problems and the allocation of resources to address these.
Increases participatory democracy and can help to improve the reputation of members as legitimate community leaders.	Can help to improve the quality of information which councils produce. Can help to foster the development of consensus and community competence.	Can help individuals to better understand the nature of local government.

a move towards neighbourhood and community governance

In the last decade, there has been a move to encourage more participatory democracy in local government, i.e. local councils using their role to inform, consult and involve local people in working towards community clarity and consensus on needs, problems and desired strategies (see box). Some proponents of this have suggested that one measure of a community's competence is the extent to which various groups of citizens share in these decision making processes.

More recently, a number of initiatives have sought to take the idea of participatory democracy further, by encouraging some element of neighbourhood & community management or governance. For example:

- **Area or ward committees**, often with co-opted stakeholder representatives, which consider plans and proposals for the local area and may have delegated budgets for commissioning projects and services.
- **Various forms of neighbourhood-based participatory budgeting** have been tested in Salford, Bradford, Newcastle and Sunderland, to allow local people to come together and make decisions about how money is spent to meet their needs.
- **Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder schemes**, in which communities work with local agencies to improve services at a neighbourhood level. A wide variety of neighbourhood management approaches have been tested including multi-agency partnerships, regeneration companies and community development trusts (where a network of independent, not for profit, community organisations are engaged in the economic, environmental and social regeneration of a defined area or community). These schemes have been highly effective in improving services and satisfaction levels in deprived areas.
- **Formal community-based groups** which govern or manage aspects of public service delivery (e.g. tenant management organisations, which give housing tenants more control over their homes and neighbourhoods) and informal residents' groups (e.g. the management committee of a local community centre funded by a council). There are a huge variety of these neighbourhood working models which can be involved in one or more of the following activities: consultation, advocacy, service delivery or design, networking, needs assessment or performance monitoring.

initiatives involving some element of participatory democracy

Best value – a review process which looks at the internal and external service delivery processes of local government and requires councils to consult relevant stakeholders.

The Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) – a programme which aims to enhance the employment prospects, education and skills of local people and tackle the needs of communities in the most deprived areas. Developing community capacity is a key objective of the SRB and the engagement of local people is central to this.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund - provides public services and communities in the 88 poorest local authority districts with extra funds to improve services and tackle deprivation. Allocations of funding require councils to carry out consultation with key stakeholders.

community engagement in Blyth Valley

As a result of its high unemployment, poor conditions and the deaths of a number of young people through drug abuse, Blyth Valley council reshaped itself as 'a community based council'. It invested £1m from its £10m budget in community development, drawing in complementary resources from other organisations and built up a 'hub and spoke' network of 25 community centres, with at least one in each ward. The aim was to increase the capacity of the community both to solve its own problems and to draw in extra resources. Blyth has changed from a low housing demand area with major social problems to an area with demand for new housing leading to investment by property companies, bringing further money into the area.

neighbourhood management in North Benwell

A partnership between the Home Office, Newcastle City Council and Northumbria Police. While funded primarily as a local Housing Market Renewal pathfinder, the partnership has matured to the point where Northumbria Police have committed mainstream financial resources to maintaining the dedicated police team. The neighbourhood manager regularly consults local residents. They have been involved in lots of decision-making: empty properties, street cleaning and directing environmental improvements through 'Living Streets'. They have also met the council to discuss the way money is spent, targets are set and progress monitored. The results are impressive, e.g. crime in the first six months of 2006 dropped by 45% and empty homes were reduced by almost 70%.

the future for neighbourhood and community engagement

The 2006 White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, set out a programme of reform which aimed to build on many of the themes already well established in local government, i.e. community leadership, democratic accountability, effective partnership working and the empowerment of citizens to have a bigger say in the public services they receive and the places they live. Within all of the changes proposed, the role of the ward member was seen as pivotal.

A large number of the White Paper proposals were concerned with strengthening and expanding the opportunities for neighbourhood & community engagement (see box). And while all of these proposals are likely to have an impact on the role of the ward member, there are two, in particular, that are worthy of mention – the Community Call for Action and the changes to secure the greater participation of citizens in the activities of local government.

community calls for action

While many councils are good at listening to their citizens, evidence often shows that local people feel their views are ignored. The White Paper proposed to strengthen two of the main ways in which local people can raise issues of concern – raising a petition and seeking help from their ward member.

Under the proposals, local authorities will have to deal more systematically with public petitions. However, in the event that petitioners are unhappy with the response they receive, they will be able to ask ward members to take the matter up as a Community Call for Action (CCfA) on their behalf.

Ward members have a key role to play in ensuring that local people's concerns are listened to by the appropriate authorities, whether they are raised formally or they become aware of them through their engagement with the community. In formalising the CCfA, councils will need to consider what powers or budgets it would be appropriate to devolve to their ward members to help them in solving minor problems - if they have not already done so.

The CCfA will apply to most services that councils are responsible for either alone or in partnership with others (the exceptions being services where there is already a statutory appeals process, such as planning, licensing, council tax and non-domestic rates). Wherever possible, members will resolve issues informally through discussions with the council executive or service providers.

Where a satisfactory solution cannot be negotiated, members will be able to refer issues to their overview and scrutiny committee(s). This will be particularly appropriate for the more intractable or strategic issues on which members need to work with colleagues and take a broader view. Committees may then make recommendations to the executive and relevant service providers

having carried out investigations of their own. Relevant public bodies will be required to have regard to the committee's recommendations, and the committee will act as a gatekeeper to ensure that the issues it deals with are of genuine interest to the community. These changes will strengthen the role of ward members as genuine community leaders, able to engage effectively with their constituents.



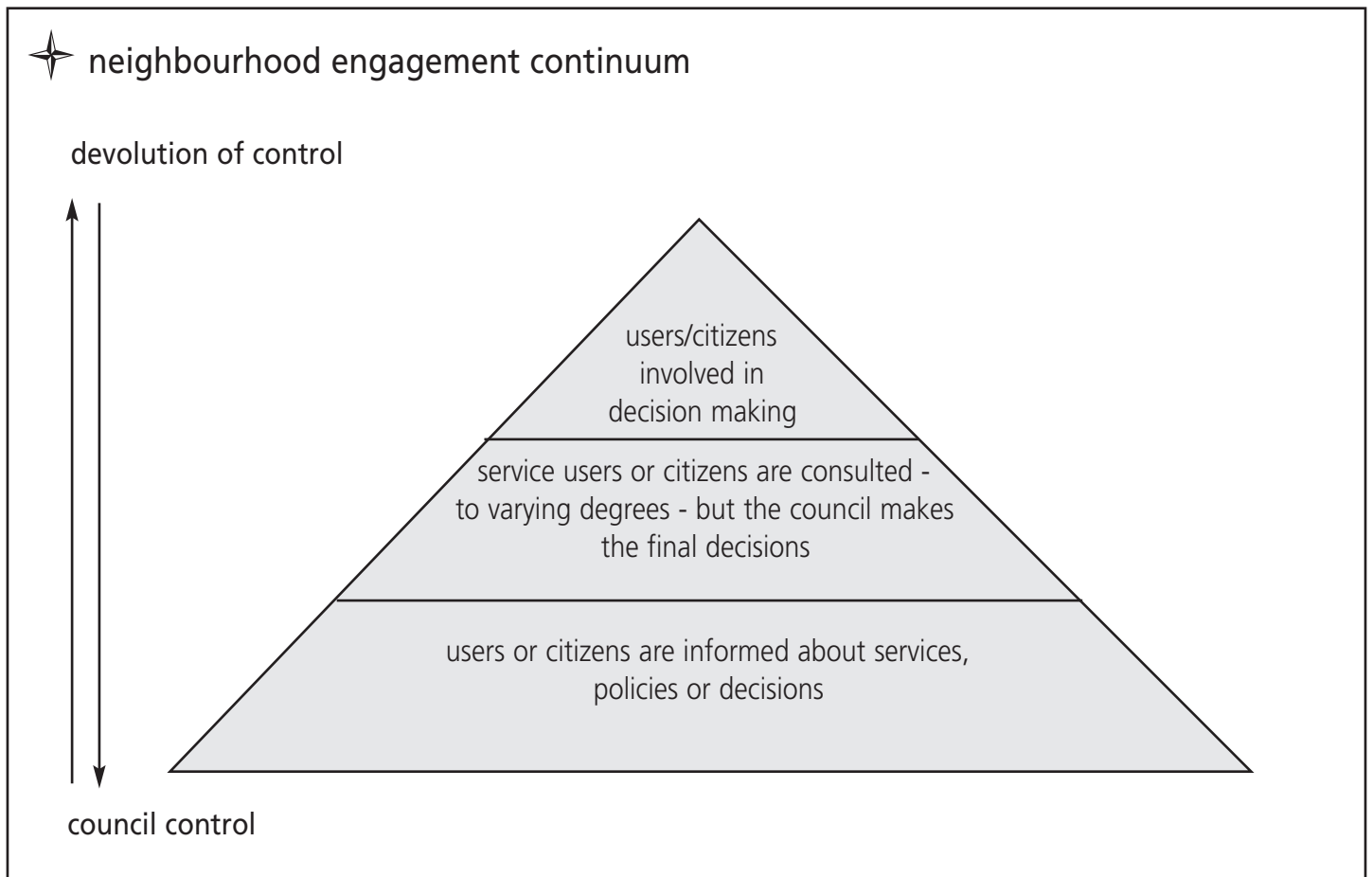
"It will give more power to citizens and communities to have a bigger say in the services they receive and the places where they live. And it will strengthen the role of the thousands of local councillors who are at the front line of local democracy and community engagement"

Local Government White Paper, 'Strong and Prosperous Communities', 2006

↔ some of the White Paper proposals

- Encouraging councils to develop neighbourhood charters, setting out local standards and priorities.
- Giving local people more say in running services and delegating the management of more services to the level of the neighbourhood.
- Closer, joint-working, at local level between partner agencies.
- Giving ward members small budgets to tackle local issues.
- Simplifying the process for setting up tenant management organisations.
- Reviewing how communities could play a bigger role in managing or owning community assets.
- A stronger legal requirement for local authorities to secure the participation of local citizens and communities in the continuous improvement of public services.
- Giving people a right to an answer when they put forward suggestions or demand action from local authorities through a new 'Community Call for Action'.

securing participation



The White Paper also sets out the range of different approaches that councils will need to adopt in securing the participation of local people in the decision making processes of local government. Namely to inform (through newsletters, websites etc.), consult (via surveys, focus groups etc.) involve (e.g. by co-opting local people onto neighbourhood management projects) and devolve (e.g. the management and ownership of a community hall).

As before, this duty will continue to place ward members at the very heart of the neighbourhood & community engagement process.

a final word

summary

We have

- *Representative democracy* in that local councilors are elected to represent their local communities.
- *Participative democracy* in that we seek to engage and involve local communities in the decisions that affect them most closely.

It is important to remember that representative and participatory democracy are not in competition with each other and there is a compelling need for better links between elected and community representatives. In their role, ward members are well placed to encourage and channel this neighbourhood & community engagement and champion both a local voice and greater local choice.

Neighbourhood & community engagement has a rightful place as one of the key processes involved in planning and decision making. As such, it should not be viewed as an additional task, but as a core part of the business of local government. It is not a resource burden, but a way of ensuring that money is well spent in meeting community needs. It does not challenge the authority of members, but provides a useful way of developing roles, strengthening democratic legitimacy and encouraging community competence – something councils and councillors are already doing.



"Communities have the right to expect co-ordinated engagement and consultation with local authorities"

Local Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities, 2006

next steps

? where do you go from here?

Look back over the material contained in earlier sections of this workbook and consider the following:

a What key action points can you identify in the way that you might tackle neighbourhood & community engagement, i.e. what three or four things might you start doing, keep doing or stop doing?

b Have you identified any gaps in your knowledge or shortcomings in your personal skills? If so, please set these out below and identify how any further training or development might help you, e.g. further reading/research, attending courses, coaching, mentoring, work shadowing etc.

appendix

sources of further information

printed publications

A Councillor's Guide, Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA).

A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal – National Strategy Action Plan, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (DCLG).

Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matters, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

Community Leadership – What is it?, Local Government Association (LGA).

Developing New Roles for Council Members, Sue Goss/Paul Corrigan, New Local Government Network/Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

National Prosperity, Local Choice and Civic Engagement: A New Partnership Between Central and Local Government for the 21st Century, Sir Michael Lyons (Lyons Inquiry).

Representation, Community Leadership and Participation: Citizen Involvement in Neighbourhood Renewal and Local Governance, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (ODPM).

The Good Councillor's Guide, National Association of Local Councils (NALC).

The Neighbourhood Agenda – The Role of the Elected Member Phase 2, Political Skills Forum/IDeA

useful websites

www.idea.gov.uk

The IDeA's website which is an invaluable source of help and advice for all those in local government.

www.localknowledge.co.uk

Run by the local futures group, a consultancy that helps local authorities develop future scenarios and understand socio-demographic, economic and environmental trends in their area.

www.neighbourhood.gov.uk

The website of the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.

www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk

Provides information on participatory budgeting schemes involving local people.

www.statistics.gov.uk/neighbourhood

Website of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) which provides ward profiles.

www.urban.odpm.gov.uk/programmes/srb/index.htm

Information on the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) which aims to enhance the employment prospects, education and skills of local people and tackle the needs of communities in the most deprived areas.

www.upmystreet.com

Type in the relevant postcode for a wealth of social and economic information by neighbourhood.



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