

Community Engagement Plan 2014 - 2017

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1. Executive Summary

This document is a statement of intent: it describes how Oxford City Council engages its communities in decision making. It builds on and supersedes the Consultation Plan and takes account of the significant developments that have occurred in neighbourhood and partnership working in recent times. It develops the “Involving Our Communities” themes already set out in the Council’s Corporate Plan 2013-17, and while the Plan describes what we intend to do in support of this priority, the Community Engagement Plan sets out the framework for how we will do it.

2. Introduction

Oxford City Council is committed to building a world-class city for all its citizens. Working with our communities to build channels for dialogue and engagement is a key part of the Council’s plan to enhance the relationship between citizens, their local communities and those who they elect to represent them. We want everyone to have the opportunity to understand and, where appropriate, contribute to decisions that affect their lives.

3. Purpose of this plan

The purpose of this new three-year Community Engagement Plan is to provide a framework for how the Council engages with its residents and communities to develop a greater understanding of their needs, and to increase the level and quality of involvement in the decisions that affect their lives.

This plan aims to clarify:

- how demographic changes in Oxford impact on our community engagement plans for the future;
- the principles underpinning the Council’s community engagement activities;
- the terms of debate i.e. how consultation and other forms of community engagement relate to formal decision-making;
- the different activities involved in community engagement and the purposes of these activities; and
- progress that has been made so far in different areas of community engagement and our plans for the future.

This plan does not address:

- the ways in which we engage residents and service users in improving specific Council services - this is addressed in detail in the Council’s Customer Contact Strategy 2014-18;
- consultation on planning applications - these are specified in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2010.

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4. Understanding our communities

The Council's Corporate Plan describes the different forms that communities can take: communities of place, identity, and interest. People often see themselves as belonging to one community of place and more than one community of interest, so the Council will need to determine the appropriate method of engagement.

Oxford appears to be a thriving city with many opportunities for work and leisure and, for many residents, this is the daily reality of their lives. However, there are major inequalities in life chances and life expectancy in our city, which will have implications for our Community Engagement Plan.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010 ranks Oxford 131st out of 354, placing it in the top half most deprived local authority areas in England. Of 85 areas in Oxford, 12 are among the 20% most deprived areas in England. These areas, in the south and east of the city, experience multiple levels of deprivation - low skills, low incomes and high levels of crime; the majority of the Council's 7,800 tenants live in these areas. Men and women from the more deprived areas can expect to live six years less than those in the more affluent areas. While 43% of Oxford residents have degree-level qualifications or above 14% have no qualifications at all.

Many Oxford residents are highly articulate and very skilled at getting their points of view heard and their voices are always welcome. However, in areas of deprivation where challenges are greatest, the capacity for community involvement is lower; in more affluent areas, the capacity for community engagement is high. This plan describes how Oxford City Council will address this imbalance, by working hard to open up more opportunities for engagement with people living in the more deprived areas of the city whose voices otherwise might not so easily be heard.

An additional layer of complexity is added when the demographics of the residents of our communities are analysed.

Oxford's high house prices make it one of the least affordable places in the country. The percentage of households who own their home is relatively low in Oxford - 47% compared to 63% in England. The percentage of households renting their home in the private sector is high - 28% in Oxford compared with 17% in England. Over the last decade the number of households renting their home in the private sector rose by almost 50%, from nearly 11,000 households in 2001 to nearly 16,000 households in 2011. One in five Oxford residents lives in a house of multiple occupation. More than 6,000 people are on our waiting list for social housing.

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Oxford's annual population churn of 25%, around 5,000 houses of multiple occupation, and a culturally diverse population present challenges in terms of sustained and effective community engagement. However, a thorough understanding of the city's demographics – city-wide and at ward and neighbourhood level – is the obvious starting point and it lies at the heart of our approach.

In terms of ethnicity, Oxford has a diverse population. In 2011, 22% of the population were from black or minority ethnic backgrounds, compared to an England average of 13%. An additional 14% of residents were of white but non-British backgrounds. The largest non-white ethnic groups represented are Pakistani, Indian, Black African, 'other Asian' and Chinese ethnic groups. The child population is considerably more ethnically diverse than the older population and as a result the population is expected to become more ethnically diverse in the future.

In 2011, 16% of Oxford residents said their main language was not English; this is twice the national average. After English, the most common main languages were Polish and Chinese languages, followed by French, Portuguese and Spanish. South Asian languages - Urdu, Bengali and Panjabi – also made up a large proportion.

A significant proportion of the population is youthful. This is in part because of the student population; 24% of the city's adult population are students compared to an England average of 6%. Overall, 32% of the city's population are aged between 18 and 29 compared to an England average of 16%.

The methods of engaging with residents of Oxford have changed considerably in the past three years (since our last Consultation Strategy was written) as a result of the increase in internet access, changes in the way of accessing the internet as well as how digital technology is used. For example, by 2012, 80% of all UK households had internet access, with 67 per cent of adults in Great Britain using a computer every day; this rises to over 80% amongst people under 45 years of age. Access to the Internet using a mobile phone more than doubled between 2010 and 2012, from 24% to 51, and in 2012 32% of adults accessed the Internet using a mobile phone every day.

The Council has responded to this by increasing the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, by main-streaming the use of eConsult, the on-line survey tool, and encouraging customer contact with the Council via the internet.

Statistics about the level and type of internet use in Oxford are not available. However, as the city a very young population due to the large number of university students, we can expect that internet usage in Oxford is higher than the national average.

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5. Principles of community engagement

Oxford City Council believes that the majority of services are best designed, delivered and reviewed on a city-wide basis. Services will, of course, reflect the different demographics and needs of areas across the city and resource allocation will vary accordingly; they will reflect the principles of proportionate universality where:

“...programs, services, and policies that are universal, but with a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the level of disadvantage.”¹

However, these variations should be seen in the context of the Council’s vision for the whole city, which is set out in the Corporate Plan and the budget approved by Council.

The Council operates within the context of a representative democracy. Community engagement is about ensuring that elected councillors are aware of and engaged with the views of individuals, community groups, and other stakeholders. It is not intended to enable minority interests to overrule the best interests of the wider community and the city as a whole; the opportunity to lobby needs to be balanced with wider views on an issue.

Engagement supports, informs and improves decision-making by elected councillors; it does not replace it. The responsibility for the final decision on any issue that involves the Council’s resources rests with the city’s elected councillors – even where that decision involves a high degree of collaboration and empowerment.

Within this context, the principles underpinning community engagement are as follows.

1. **Commitment:** giving engagement sufficient priority, space, time and resources and demonstrating that it is a genuine attempt to understand and incorporate other opinions even when they conflict with the existing point of view. Resource planning is done through the development of an annual consultation plan.
2. **Inclusiveness:** the participation of all stakeholders who have an interest in or who would be affected by a specific decision, including groups that are sometimes more challenging to engage such as young people, older people, minority groups, and people with disabilities.
3. **Accessibility:** providing different ways for people to be engaged and ensuring that people are not excluded through barriers of language, culture or opportunity.

¹ The concept of proportionate universality was introduced by Sir Michael Marmot. Source: Policy Brief 2011. <http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/documents/70/>

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4. **Transparency and clarity:** ensuring that all stakeholders are given the information they need, told what they can or cannot influence by responding to engagement and what the next steps will be.
5. **Accountability:** after the engagement process ensure that participants receive feedback of how and why their contributions have or have not influenced the outcome. Also ensure that there are routes for follow-up including reporting on final decisions and/or implementation plans.
6. **Responsiveness:** those doing the engagement must be open to the idea that their existing plans may need to be changed, improved or even deleted. For those being consulted they must believe that their voice will be taken seriously, and that things can be changed if there is support for change.
7. **Willingness to learn:** encouraging both those carrying out the consultation and the participants to learn from each other. This means a style of process that is as interactive and as incremental as possible to build increasing layers of mutual understanding and respect.
8. **Productivity:** establishing from the outset how the engagement process will make something better. Maximise the benefit of the engagement activity by effectively sharing data and information
9. **Quality assurance:** all community engagement projects are carefully planned and approved by the Public Involvement Board to ensure that they meet legal and quality standards.

In October 2013 the Cabinet Office issued its guidance on Consultation Principles, which sets out the principles that public bodies should adopt for engaging stakeholders when developing policy and legislation. It replaces the Code of Practice on Consultation issued in July 2008. The guidance is intended to improve the way public bodies consult by emphasising a more “proportionate and targeted” approach, so that the type and scale of engagement is proportionate to the potential impacts of the proposal under consideration.

6. Methods of community engagement

In 2011, the government scrapped the Duty to Involve. The Duty, which came into force in April 2009, required local councils to inform, consult and involve citizens in decision-making where appropriate and to ‘embed a culture of engagement and empowerment’. It was the underpinning of the Consultation Strategy 2010 – 2013, and now, as then, the Council’s commitment to community engagement goes much further than legislative requirements.

Oxford City Council has a long track record of working with local people to build strong and active communities - community engagement is at the heart of how the Council does business. For example, working in the 1990s to regenerate east Oxford; engaging with the Prince’s Foundation and the people of Blackbird Leys to improve the quality of life there; working with local people to remodel play areas across the city and engaging local people in Rose Hill to develop a new community centre; and working with Cowley Road Works to revive the popular Cowley Road Carnival.

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Oxford City Council’s Community Engagement Plan is based on the widely accepted ‘ladder of participation’ model, which shows an increasing level of community involvement as one moves “up” the ladder from left to right, as shown below.²



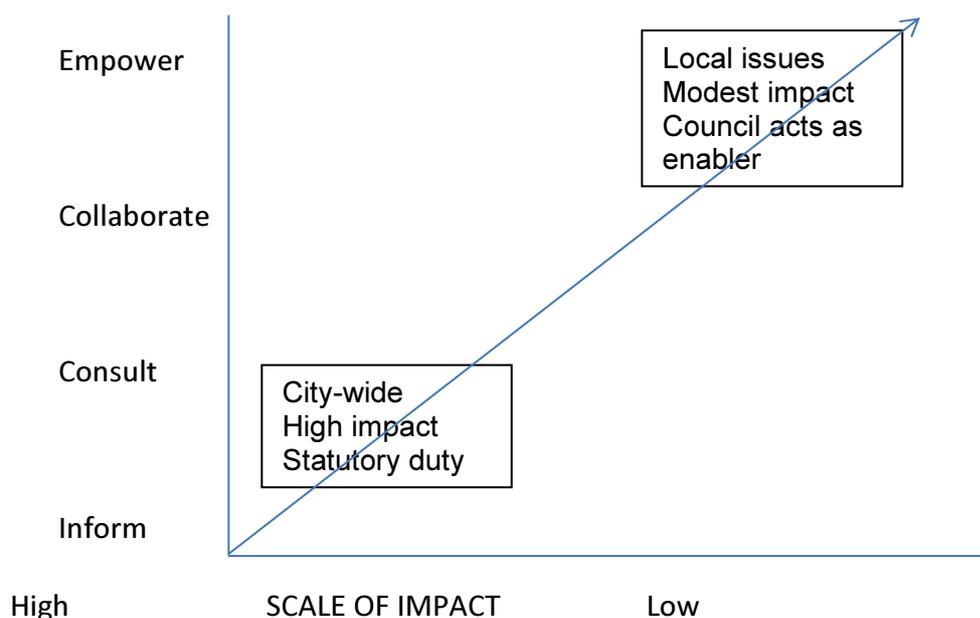
Inform	Research	Consult	Collaborate	Empower
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and solutions.	To gather and collate information to help in the understanding of key issues.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and decisions.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decisions including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

When deciding on how the community might be involved, i.e. which level of engagement to deploy, local authorities must carefully consider the nature, scale and impact of a particular function or issue, and must promote equal opportunities for people to engage and get involved.

Engagement requires a range of mechanisms which build and sustain a conversation with the community, with a broad or narrow audience as the issue requires. Broad principles and general ideas could be consulted on across a wide audience while the details of implementation might require input from a much smaller group. Effective engagement means identifying the kinds of audience that need to be involved at each stage of the process on any given issue. This requires a good understanding of the networks of interest and expertise in the area. The model below shows how the type of engagement varies according to the scale of impact, the role of the council and the nature and scale of the communities impacted by the issue.

² Adapted from David Wilcox, Guide to Effective Participation, 1994.
<http://www.partnerships.org.uk/guide/>

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7. Inform

This level of community engagement aims to provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist the understanding of issues. The residents of Oxford receive information through a variety of media channels, as shown in the table below.

Method	Frequency
Your Oxford	2 per year
City Briefing	3per year
Facebook and Twitter	>daily
Oxford City Council website	> daily
Media releases	>daily
Service specific briefings	>Bi-monthly
Television and radio	Ad hoc

Within the framework of the Community Engagement Plan, Oxford City Council seeks to improve accessibility by engaging local communities through communication channels best suited to their needs. This means using new channels such as social media alongside the more traditional press releases and publications. In addition, we seek to improve inclusiveness through the development of local newspapers, such as *Leys News*.

Informing residents is also achieved through Neighbourhood Forums and Community Partnerships, which are described in more detail under Collaborate.

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8. Research

The Council carries out research through both its social research functions (statistical analysis) and as part of its consultation function (opinion and perception research). The social research function delivers high quality quantitative data to support policy development, service delivery, and project implementation. This is carried out by a central service within the Policy, Culture and Communications service area, and includes:

- Finding and sourcing data that can inform particular research questions.
- Researching and analysing data to inform strategies and plans.
- Making research data available internally across service areas and externally to the public and communities, to enable them to understand the needs of their areas. The data can be used to help groups to develop funding bids, for example the social inclusion fund. This is done through the annual summary leaflet, website, monthly statistical publication and general statistics enquiry service.
- Providing research data that advocates the city's needs to other agencies that provide services.
- Providing links to national research.

Through our consultation function we carry out surveys which seek to understand the experiences, opinions and perceptions of our residents and service users. This research is carried out through a variety of methods including a citizen's panel, postal surveys and focus groups. This is described in more detail under Consult.

A specific challenge that the new Community Engagement Plan seeks to address is the opportunity to increase productivity by more effectively sharing information gathered by or available to, the Council. It would involve the routine use of both qualitative and quantitative data in strategy and plan development and decision-making.

9. Consult

Consultation sits on the middle rung of the ladder of community involvement and it can only be successful with the active participation of the public. It is an appropriate method of public engagement when the community has a high level of interest and, or a high level of influence over a decision. Consultation seeks public feedback on analysis, options and plans in order to inform decision making. These decisions are critical to the successful development of council policy and strategy, service design and service delivery.

Oxford City Council has a well-established consultation process that is managed as a central service by Consultation Officers within the Policy, Culture and Communications service area. The process is documented in the Consultation Toolkit, which also includes methods of

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consultation, and pre- and post- consultation activities. It can be found at <http://occweb/intranet/consultation-toolkit.cfm>.

All consultation activities are managed through eConsult, which is an externally hosted on-line system that supports the creation of surveys, the management of registered users and the creation and posting of reports from survey results. This can be found at <http://consultation.oxford.gov.uk/consult.ti/system/userHome>.

The Consultation Office is responsible for the Citizens' Talkback Panel of approximately 1000 local residents. Recruitment of the panel and administration of the twice yearly survey is out-sourced to a specialist market research company, currently Ipsos MORI. From 2014 the Council will participate in a postal satisfaction survey, called LG Inform, which will enable benchmarking with other local authorities across the UK.

The Consultation Office is a member of the County Consultation Group, a forum for sharing best practices across local authorities and for the co-ordination of county-wide consultation activities, when required

There are several challenges that this new Community Engagement Plan seeks to address. First, there is a need to improve inclusiveness and accessibility to the consultation process. It should involve a more diverse and thus a more representative cross section of Oxford's communities, which may require changes to the way in which residents are involved in decision making and specifically how they are consulted.

Second, there is a need to improve accountability and responsiveness by ensuring that results of consultations and action plans are routinely posted and made available to the public. This will form one strand of a new service level agreement that we will be developed with service areas.

Lastly, we aim to increase productivity by "driving to digital" in our consultation methods. Many aspects of consultation are more cost effective if they are done on-line, and indeed may be more attractive to the younger age-groups. However, driving to digital should not be done at the expense of our inclusiveness and accessibility principles.

10. Collaborate

Collaboration with the public includes the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. It requires a higher level of involvement by the community, but they are not decision making forums. They include the following:

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10.1 Area Forums

The Council has formed Area Forums consisting of all ward councillors in any given area of the city. These are informal meetings, sponsored and supported by the Council, to engage with the communities in their area. Each area is free to adapt its arrangements to best meet its own needs. The purpose of Area Forums is to:

- identify key issues and priorities to feed into city-wide service and budget planning processes
- enable local councillors to play a central role in drawing up community plans, which provides an opportunity to link up service-planning more closely with local needs and aspirations
- provide a space in which residents and community groups can work with mainstream service providers – health, education, police, businesses and the voluntary sectors – to ensure that local services are responsive to community needs
- comment on policy documents and proposals that affect the area
- enable local issues and interests to be discussed with local members.

Oxford City Council is:

- providing each Councillor with an annual budget of £1,500 for small projects that link to the priorities emerging from forum discussions and other local consultations
- exploring ways to ensure that all of our communities, including the more ‘hidden’ groups, have the opportunity to engage with them
- providing an Area Support Officer to arrange and publicise meetings, and Senior Management support for each Area Forum

10.2 Community Partnerships and Plans

Community Partnerships exist in those areas of the city which have been identified as being in greatest need. They are not decision-making bodies but provide a focus for local action and engagement on local issues.

A neighbourhood management approach is being implemented in these areas to engage and actively involve local communities, and to develop a stronger sense of community. Neighbourhood management involves residents working in partnership with mainstream service providers, the local authority, businesses and the voluntary and community sectors to address local priorities and make local services more responsive to the needs of their area. It is a process which recognises the uniqueness of each place; allowing the people that live, work or provide services in it to build on its strengths and address its specific

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challenges. These areas are most likely to see collaboration and empowerment to tackle local systemic problems and issues.

Community Partnerships are established in the key regeneration areas: Barton, The Leys, Rose Hill, Wood Farm, Northway, Cutteslowe and Littlemore with members on each partnership representing:

- residents
- public service providers, e.g. the police, health services, council services
- councillors
- community/voluntary groups
- businesses

Community plans are being developed in these areas so that there is co-ordinated action to address local issues and services can respond more effectively to local needs. Community development starts from the principle that, within any community, there is a wealth of knowledge and experience which can be channelled into collective action to achieve desired goals.

Oxford City Council is:

- Providing a Neighbourhood Locality Officer who supports and develops the partnership approach and co-ordinates bi-monthly or quarterly meetings and sub-groups to work on specific topic areas e.g. young people, housing and environment.
- Providing Community Development Officer support to engage with residents and develop local projects and support capacity building .
- Grant funding to Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA) to support greater involvement of the voluntary sector within the partnerships
- Senior Management support for each partnership

These resources will primarily be focused on tackling the issues identified in the community plan.

10.3 Resident Involvement

Oxford City Council's work with the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) involves the tenants and leaseholders of the council's 8,000 flats and houses who co-exist in areas of mixed tenure. Here problem solving and the driving of initiatives cannot be delivered successfully without the involvement of all groups concerned.

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Oxford City Council is:

- creating a structure which enables broad involvement opportunities across all demographics and geographical areas of the city
- enabling varied involvement opportunities which allow tenants, residents and leaseholders to be involved in ways that suit their needs
- developing training and support opportunities and encouragement for the widest possible audience
- ensuring that structures do not allow one group, issue or process to become dominant
- ensuring transparency so that tenants, residents and leaseholders are able to see the difference that has been made as a result of their engagement.

10.4 Youth Voice

The City Council's Youth Ambition Strategy details the Council's approach to engage young people in positive activities and its aim to more fully involve young people in how we develop and deliver services. Youth Voice is a programme to support the children and young people of Oxford City between the ages of 15 and 21 (25 where there are special educational needs) to have influence and power over services that affect their lives.

The Youth Voice plan will work towards the following outcomes:

- For Oxford City Council to have a more pro-active approach to gaining, listening to and acting on the feedback of young people and to influence partners to do the same;
- To engage young people in activities that allow them to make the positive changes they feel are needed in their community;
- For young people to have increased access to decision makers in their local community, the city, regionally and nationally, allowing them to have influence and power over decisions, processes and services that will affect their transition into adulthood;
- To provide more and better personal and professional development opportunities to young people enabling them to effectively engage with decision makers;
- To create a legacy of participation across the city and for young people to become role models and ambassadors for change now and in their adult lives.

10.5 Older People

Oxford City Council co-ordinates the Ageing Successfully Partnership to provide a partnership approach to addressing the needs of Older People in the City to improve wellbeing; address isolation and increase engagement with older people.

An Older People's Needs Assessment has recently been carried out to review the needs of the older population of Oxford. This work will help inform the City Council of the longer term support for older people in the city.

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The City Council work closely with the 50+ Network which is a volunteer run community group whose aim is to engage with older people on relevant issues and increase involvement. This group have a representative on the Ageing Successfully Partnership.

10.6 Neighbourhood Planning

The Localism Act has introduced new rights and powers for communities and individuals to enable them to get directly involved in spatial planning for their areas. Neighbourhood planning will allow communities to come together through a parish council or neighbourhood forum and produce a neighbourhood plan. Neighbourhood plans are about allocating land for development and being able to say where new houses, businesses, shops and so on should go and what they should look like. The council's preference is to start with Community Planning to identify issues and needs, and then translate this spatial planning as the mechanism for developing and delivering solutions. Once plans are adopted they will become an important consideration when making decisions on planning applications.

Three local groups have asked Oxford City Council to formally designate their proposed neighbourhood areas. Designating a neighbourhood area is the first step towards producing a neighbourhood plan. The proposed neighbourhood areas are:

- Wolvercote
- Jericho
- Summertown and St Margaret's

The details of the neighbourhood area applications and comments received will be considered at a meeting of the City Executive Board, where the final decision on whether to designate each of the proposed neighbourhood areas will be made.

10.7 Oxford Strategic Partnership

The Oxford Strategic Partnership was formed in 2003 in response to central government directive to set up a local strategic partnership. It is a testament to the success of the partnership and the on-going need for partnership working that it has continued to exist and develop, although no longer a statutory requirement.

The Partnership comprises key city stakeholders who develop and deliver on a range of long term priorities through themed working groups. The work is overseen by the OSP board.

From a community engagement perspective, it has been acknowledged that programme delivery would be more effective if there was a coherent approach to participation and engagement with Oxford residents and communities. This will be achieved through the development and implementation of a participation and engagement framework by the OSP and its working groups. The opportunity to share information related to community contacts and groups across the working groups has also been identified.

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As a member of the Oxford Strategic Partnership, the city council is in a position to contribute to and benefit from the identification of community networks and improvements to partnership and engagement practices.

In this context a specific challenge that this Community Engagement Plan seeks to address is the opportunity to improve productivity by more effectively coordinating and linking up the Council's consultation work with that of its OSP partners.

11. Empower

Empowerment, in the context of the ladder of involvement, means that decision-making is put in the hands of the community or groups. Devolved decision making is relatively unusual but where it is practiced, it is placed within guidelines that have been determined by the Council.

Empowerment is best suited to situations where it affects well-defined and well-understood groups, the implications are modest, and it is not the clear statutory responsibility of any one party. For example, youth grants and some arts funding, where voting by "expert" panels can decide how money is spent.

Empowerment of the community requires that the community understands the decision-making process and how and when it can engage. The difficulty of balancing the interests of different types of communities (of place, identity and interest) or groups means that this form of community engagement is the exception rather than the rule. Where it is not clear the members' role is to balance interests and make decisions in the best interests of wider communities.

12. Next steps

When the results of consultation have been analysed, the system for evaluating community engagement activities will be developed. In addition an action plan will be written and incorporated into service plans.

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