

## Appendix 2



**Chester-le-Street**  
District Council

# Draft Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy

## Summary



**April 2006**

Version 1.1  
Report Council 25th May 2006

## Appendix 2

### Foreword

Customer focus has to be at the heart of what we do as a council and it is. This is clear from the first priority in our Corporate Plan to the actions that underpin our Customer Excellence Strategy. As part of our important Community leadership role are working day in day out to improve how we involve the community in what we do. There are some great examples of where success is being achieved.

We want to increase the opportunities for our communities to engage with us. We also want to ensure that these opportunities are grasped by our communities so that as many people as possible can take an active part in improving service delivery and local democracy. The health of our council and our communities depends on the participation of ordinary people both in community and voluntary activity pressing their needs and wishes through our processes. This is in order that they can improve not only their quality of life but the quality of like of others.

We want to have a society where all of our citizens are active in their communities and participate in shaping their future. We mean all. We do not want to exclude anyone as part of our vision. Whether 'hard to reach' or 'hard to hear' we want our communities to have a true voice. We want to ensure that Chester-le Street has an independent, representative and effective council which works alongside strong, self-confident communities. Through strong community leadership we are determined to make this happen.

Building stronger communities is not new to us or to local government generally. It has been a clear council objective in the past and it remains a fundamental aim of Chester-le-Streets Community Strategy – our community's vision of the future. We need to build on community engagement activity not just within the council but by working with our partners to increase opportunities. We have limited resources to do this and we need to work with others to maximise impact.

Our Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy is our plan of action to achieve our vision. We need to first understand our community's needs and aspirations. We then have to let our communities know what we are doing. We can then improve engagement by improving our processes, working with others, co-ordinating activity to allow us to meet national and local aspirations. It will take time for the council and our communities to develop and realise what we are setting out to do. The Strategy is therefore transitional as well as transformational.

While the council can drive the implementation of our strategy we will depend on every member of our community to become interested in our work, our decisions and our actions. This is our first Consultation and Engagement Strategy and is largely about what we feel we need to do. It is a living document and not set in stone. We will now be engaging our partners and community to develop the strategy. We want to know now what you think we should do, how we should go about it and do you want to take part with us.

**Linda Ebbatson**  
**Leader of the Council**

Version 1.1  
Report Council 25th May 2006

## Appendix 2

### 1. The Strategy

1.1 The Strategy is based on a businesses planning approach to the issue of engagement and involvement. It is structured as follows:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be/
- How are we going to get there?

1.2. In terms of 'where are we now?' the Strategy :

- Identifies what we mean by the strategy including the national and local context to engagement
- Provides details of the audit we have undertaken on what we do
- Highlight areas of good practice and where change is required

The aims of this is to develop the vision and aims of the Strategy

### 2. The Strategy Vision and Aims.

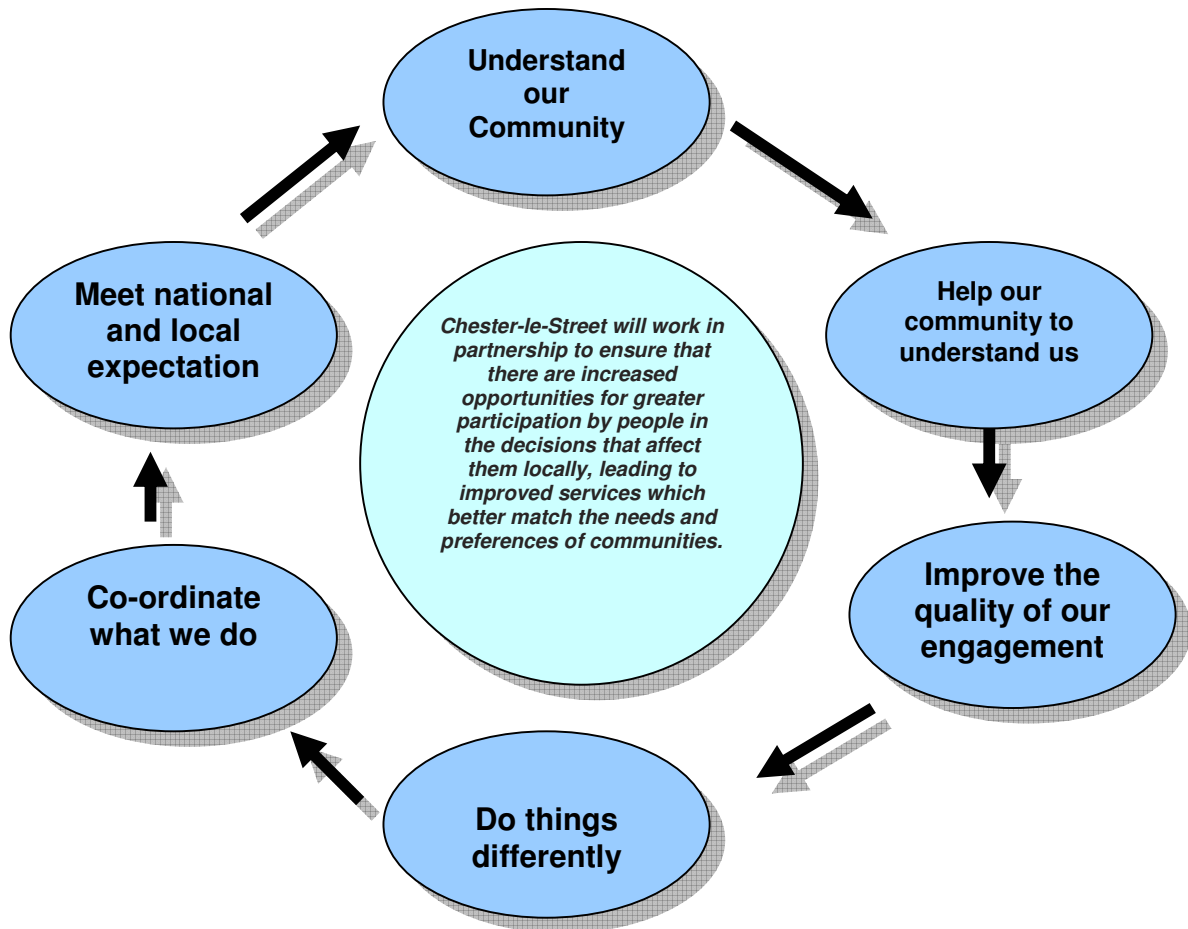
2.1 This Strategy must be primarily about exercising community leadership to assist local people and communities engage with the council to help influence decisions we make. It must also, however be about how we work and how we perform if we are to address what will be expected of us in the future. We have a challenge in raising the reputation of the council and our partners by developing closer and better relationships with our communities and customers. We have limited resources and need to work together to avoid duplication and provide value for money. Paragraph 1.18 set out the Governments vision of community and engagement in the long term. It is considered that this vision is of equal importance to the communities in the District of Chester-le-Street. This vision would underpin the overall mission of the council in '**Working together to fulfill the needs of our communities**'.

The Strategy vision is therefore:

***Chester-le- Street will work in partnership to ensure that there are increased opportunities for greater participation by people in the decisions that affect them locally, leading to improved services which better match the needs and preferences of communities.***

## Appendix 2

2.1 To achieve our vision what we need to do is shown as follows;



2.2 Our aims are therefore:

**Aim 1** : Improve the understanding of our communities, their wants, needs and aspirations;

**Aim 2** : Improve communications with communities to ensure that they understand the activities of the council and their partners including our achievements and reasons behind our decisions;

**Aim 3** : Improve the quality and accessibility of our community engagement and involvement practices and processes;

**Aim 4** : Ensure that we work with communities, partners and the voluntary and community sector to maximise resources and develop new ways of working to engage with all communities including those that may 'hard to reach' or 'hard to hear';

## Appendix 2

**Aim 5** : Develop a co-ordinated approach to community engagement and involvement across all council services and with partners wherever possible; and

**Aim 6** : Ensure that the council effectively addresses the national vision to improve community engagement and in doing so meet both national and local expectations

2.3 The intended outcomes of the vision and aims are as follows:

- The council and its partners will be more knowledgeable about our communities and have better understanding to base our decisions upon
- The community will be more knowledgeable about what the council, and its partners do, what they are achieving on their behalf and the standards of service they may expect.
- There will be improved and increased opportunities for people to be engaged in the councils and partners activities including the design and delivery of services
- The council and its partners will listen more to our communities and will show that account has been taken of views when decisions are made
- Trust and understanding between the council, partners and community will be developed
- The community will accept the councils duty to make decisions but will understand the reasons why they have been made in the light of feedback that will be given
- There will be consistency in how the community are consulted and engaged and co-ordination will reduce consultation overload
- Value for money in engaging people will be demonstrated across partner organisations.

2.4 The council's vision in terms of community engagement and involvement largely follows the governments 10 year vision. In principle this is to work with others to encourage greater community involvement in what we do to help communities influence our decisions are provide improved services.

2.5 By working to achieve this vision the council and its partners will improve relations with the people we serve and meet national and local expectations.

## Appendix 2

### 3. The Strategy Action Plan

#### Who we should engage and involve

- 3.1 We will be engaging the following on a regular basis:
- council tax payers and citizens;
  - residents and tenants associations;
  - local businesses;
  - service users and potential service users
  - the voluntary and community sector, and
  - Partner organisations
- 3.2 When developing a proposal, reviewing a policy or making a decision we will aim to identify and engage those who have an interest or be affected by the options we consider and the decisions we make. We will share knowledge and understanding within the council and with our partners to develop good intelligence of those who need to be involved.
- 3.3 We will work hard to avoid excluding those in our community that are 'hard to reach', 'hard to hear' or have not engaged with the council in the past. In particular this means specifically targeting ethnic minority groups, people at risk of exclusion as a result of their isolated communities, children and young people, older people, travelers and gypsies, people with disabilities, an lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

#### What we should engage and involve people on and how we should go about it

- 3.4 Engagement and involvement will continue to be a firm part of the Councils Constitution. We will engage and involve communities when we:
- make decisions which have significant impact on communities and individuals;
  - agree our priorities;
  - design our services;
  - plan our services;
  - procure our services
  - measure our performance; and
  - develop our plans, policies and strategies
- 3.5 We will undertake statutory consultations in a positive spirit .Where there is choice about how we consult and engage we will attempt to do things differently and more effectively through a range of methods. We will ensure that in our project planning we will provide adequate time for people to take part. This will be linked to our decision making processes to ensure that people in communities have a chance to influence outcomes.

## **Appendix 2**

- 3.6 We will look to innovate in the methods we use and will consider forms of engagement and involvement we have never used in the past. In doing so we will seek the communities and partners views on the best methods for individual processes.
- 3.7 We will enhance the ability of our public to participate in council meetings including scrutiny and ensure that the experience is a positive and welcoming one particularly for those not used to public speaking.

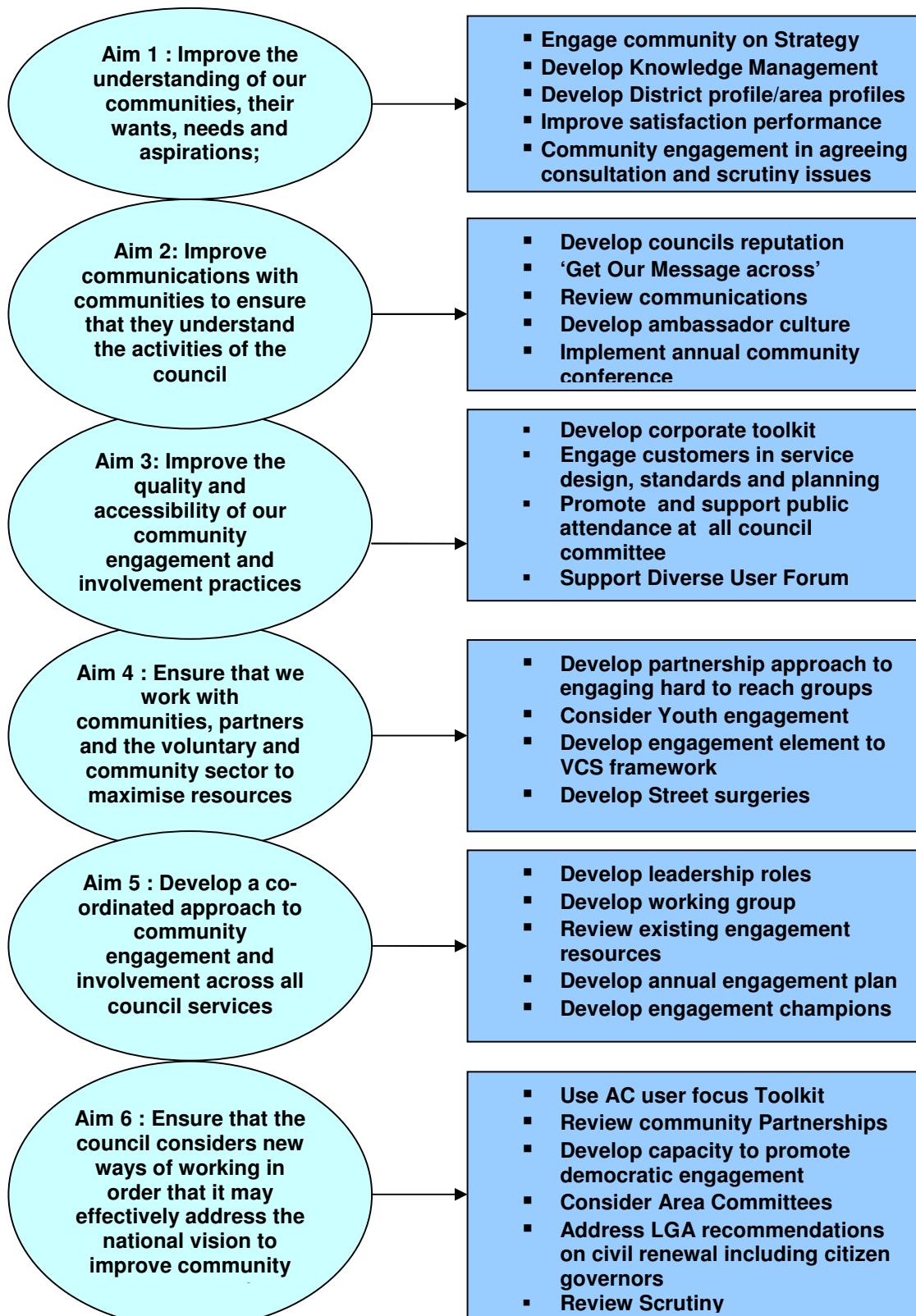
### **Learning**

- 3.8 The council is committed to learning from everything its does. It will evaluate the success or otherwise of the engagement and involvement techniques and the implementation of the action plan. A corporate database could assist this. The council will consult widely on this Strategy and engage groups in its Implementation, Monitoring and review. We will continue our annual Residents Survey to gain regular feedback on whether the council is improving. We will document learning on the implementation of the Strategy and re-consider our approaches as a result.

### **The Strategy Action Plan**

- 3.9 A detailed action plan is provided in the main Strategy document. The action sets out what we are going to do to address the issues set out in the strategy to meet the Strategy vision and aims. More detailed action plans for individual actions will be developed by lead officers during the implementation of the proposals. The action plan is derived from the six key aims of the Strategy and includes key actions and change. The principals are summarised in the diagram on the following page.

## Appendix 2



### Key Aims

### Key Actions



## Appendix 2

### 4 Monitoring and Reviewing the Implementation of the Strategy

- 4.1 Strategies rapidly become obsolete unless constantly reviewed and adjusted as part of a permanent strategic management process. In addition things change and communities will require different things. The strategy may change as a result of engagement with our communities. This document is therefore a living document which will be reviewed on the basis of such change.
- 4.2 It is intended that the implementation of the Strategy will be initially monitored by the council's Project Management Board and will be led by the Assistant Chief Executive. This ought to continue until a more specific project board is developed as part of the Strategy proposals (Community Engagement and Involvement Working Group)
- 4.3 Reports on Progress will be made to Corporate Management Team and the Executive through the Corporate Performance Reporting System. Such reports will also be made available to Scrutiny panels in due course. Where there is any slippage corrective action will be taken. Where there is a need to significantly review the plan this will be by council resolution. Minor changes to the plan will be the responsibility of the Project Management Board.
- 4.4 There are clearly resource issues associated with the implementation of the Strategy. It is anticipated that most of the action plan will be achieved by developing revised more effective practices and new ways of working. Where there are significant resource implications these will be identified and considered in the more detailed project plans that will be developed to achieve the Strategy action plans. A key risk to the delivery of the strategy is the availability of officer time to deliver the action plan. This will need to be managed within the organisation.