

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

## Vision for South Hams and West Devon:

We want to have broken new ground nationally in the way we engage with local people to deliver:

- top quality services, redesigned with the people that use them
- local communities that feel supported and enabled to prosper

### 1.0 Aim of the Strategy

- 1.1 In a recent research report published in February 2011, West Devon had the highest levels of volunteering anywhere in the Country based on the 2008 Place Survey results. South Hams was listed as 4<sup>th</sup> highest in terms of volunteering and 9<sup>th</sup> in terms of people's involvement in decision making.
- 1.2 From this very impressive base we believe that we can extend our engagement with local communities to deliver some clear outcomes over the next four years:
- Better quality decisions informed by stronger engagement
  - More innovative services designed around the needs and experiences of service users
  - Stronger communities that feel empowered to make decisions and get involved in shaping their local areas for the better. The Council will ensure that engagement is meaningful and that local people can make a difference
- 1.3 This strategy sets out the ways in which South Hams and West Devon will deliver our vision in relation to Community Engagement. The vision clearly sets out our commitment to engaging more effectively with our local communities. The current climate in which we are working means that our valuable resources are being squeezed tighter and we must make sure that the services we are delivering and the actions that we are taking, meet the current and future needs of our local communities. Our best chance of succeeding in this endeavour is to involve our communities in our processes and provide them with an effective voice.
- 1.4 We want to build on existing links with communities and organisations, strengthening the role of elected Members as community representatives, but also develop new relationships to ensure all of the different communities in the local area have a voice and can influence and shape our work. This will help to improve the delivery of services and ensure our communities are sustainable and vibrant.

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- 1.5 Elected Members have a key role to play as democratically elected representatives of communities. Councillors currently provide invaluable support to local people, helping them to have their voice heard and we want to enable them to build on this work.
- 1.6 More comprehensive Community Engagement will help residents and visitors to understand our processes and the way that we make decisions and ensure that the Council is more transparent, and accountable to our communities.

## 2.0 Principles of Community Engagement

- 2.1 Our work on Community Engagement will always focus on:
  - Empowering our communities to take responsibility for the area in which they live
  - Enabling our communities to have a 'Voice'
  - Putting communities at the heart of what we do by involving them in decision making
  - Reducing duplication and consultation fatigue
  - Becoming more transparent and accountable to the public
- 2.2 We consider Community Engagement to be central to the work of the council and in delivering customer focussed services. This represents a significant shift in the way that we work with communities and we are committed to putting communities and involvement at the heart of all we do.

## 3.0 Who are our communities?

- 3.1 The landscape of South Hams and West Devon is characterised by its geography - thriving market towns and smaller, rural and coastal communities. There are also many different interest groups that make up a living community and it is important that we understand the different 'communities' that exist to ensure we engage with them effectively. The joint area of West Devon and South Hams covers 2066 square kilometres and includes over 130,000 residents. Our challenge is to ensure that we enable different communities to engage with the Councils in a way that is appropriate for them.
- 3.2 We will have processes in place which will mean that whether you are an individual with a concern about dog fouling in your local park, or a community group keen to influence planning policies or a Parish Council wanting to design street cleaning services in your Parish, there are clear routes into your Councils to enable you to express your views and influence services.

## 4.0 Strands of Community Engagement

- 4.1 Community Engagement work within the Council will focus on three main strands of influence:
  - a. Shaping the overall direction of the authority
  - b. Shaping Service Delivery
  - c. Shaping Localities

### 4.2 Shaping the overall direction of the authority

We will ensure that at the highest strategic level, communities can influence the direction. The Council has committed to a Joint Partnership across South Hams and West Devon which brings together partners such as public sector organisations, the voluntary sector, community and business representatives to work together to tackle problems within the local area.

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Community Engagement in this process is critical to ensure that the Partnership is focussing its attention and resources on areas of local need. Elected Members will play a key role as community leaders in scrutinising the Partnership and making sure the partners are delivering on their promises.

### **4.3 Shaping Service Delivery**

We will be proactive in involving communities at the start of shaping, designing and re-designing services. The users of services have a range of experience and are often best placed to help design the most appropriate method of service delivery. We will have a range of mechanisms in place to enable this to take place and will work to involve not only the end users, but also those affected by decisions for example Parish and Town Councils or local businesses.

### **4.4 Shaping Localities**

The way in which we engage with our communities on shaping local areas is extremely important. We will ensure effective community involvement so that our communities have access to the right facilities and infrastructure to meet needs and remain sustainable places to live.

We will use a joined up approach to considering the sustainability of communities and have a holistic view of the requirements in a local area.

The Councils' Statement of Community Involvement is a document which sets out when and how we involve our communities in planning issues and this will form an integral part of our approach to Community Engagement.

### **5.0 Our Commitments to Community Engagement**

- 5.1 We will build new relationships with particular sectors of the community to ensure that their interests are represented and they can effectively influence the ways in which we work.
- 5.2 We are committed to working effectively with the business community and will enable them to come together to jointly influence strategic decisions. These decisions could range from the setting of the Council's budget to the development of licensing or planning policies or more operational matters. We want to act as the bridge between the strategic Local Enterprise Partnership operating across Devon and Somerset and local businesses.
- 5.3 We are committed to working alongside the Voluntary and Community Sector at a time when their input in delivering local services and building community activity is becoming more critical.
- 5.4 We will enable a more mutually beneficial relationship with Town and Parish Councils where we work to resolve issues together and will seek to devolve services where there is a demand.
- 5.5 We will ensure that all of our services will put Community Engagement at the heart of policy development and service delivery by involving and engaging with communities as early as possible so that they can influence decision making and the redesign of services.
- 5.6 We will strengthen the role of elected Members as community representatives.
- 5.7 We will be transparent about our activities by publishing results of engagement activities and setting out what we have changed as a result of engagement, developing stronger feedback mechanisms.

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- 5.8 We will use Connect as a vehicle for engaging with our communities alongside our partners.
- 5.9 We will work with our partners to ensure a joined up approach to engaging with our communities to enable the development of sustainable communities.

### **6.0 Monitoring of the Strategy**

- 6.1 We will review this strategy annually and monitor its effectiveness by developing a series of performance measures with the community which are both qualitative and quantitative
- 7.0 We are committed to acknowledging the full diversity of our community and to promoting equality of opportunity for everyone in policy making, service delivery, employment practice, regulation and enforcement.

This strategy can be made available in large print, Braille, tape format or in any other language on request.