

Purpose and Definition

1. South Hams District Council is committed to all its communities in the broadest sense and wishes to work towards an increasing sense of social, economic and environmental well-being in line with its objectives and commitments. This policy statement describes how the Council's overall objectives and priorities influence its working with its communities.
2. For the purpose of this policy, “community” is defined as:-
 - people in a geographical area – eg a district, a town and surrounding hinterland, a town or village, a neighbourhood or street, etc.
 - people sharing a common interest or situation – eg conservation, health, pollution, youth issues, recycling, arts & heritage, business development, users of particular services, disability action, socially excluded, voluntary sector partnership, etc.

Council Objectives and Priorities

3. Consistent with the developing South Hams Community Strategy, under-pinned by extensive consultation with agencies and stakeholders across the private, public, voluntary and community sectors, the Council has established:-
 - a set of strategic priorities and an overall objective **to improve the well-being of the people of the South Hams**;
 - a commitment, in all its activities, to:-
 - **equality of opportunity and particularly targeting hard to reach and vulnerable groups**;
 - **sustainability**;
 - **community involvement and community vibrancy**;
 - **effective partnership**;
 - **communication, consultation and openness**;
 - value for money.
4. All these above matters, especially the highlighted commitments, are supported by the Council's community involvement activities of:-
 - **informing** the community about the Council's activities and encouraging support;
 - **consulting** the community before important decisions affecting them are made;
 - **involving** local people, groups and partners in actions to improve quality of life and community safety in the South Hams;
 - **enabling** the community to achieve their goals in a sustainable way.

Aims of Community Involvement

5. The Council's community involvement "mission" is:-

"Helping the community help itself"
6. In support of its responsibility to prepare "community strategies" for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development, the Council will:-
 - work with and support communities to help define their needs and priorities and assist in the development of action plans to improve quality of life;
 - encourage communities to be self-sufficient, with local ownership of ideas and outcomes and organisations and groups working together to achieve locally-agreed common aims;
 - endeavour to involve all sections of the community in developing and implementing the strategies;
 - contribute towards the promotion and maintenance of a vibrant, safe and prosperous place for people to live, work and play;
 - pay full regard to these strategies when reviewing its overall priorities and its assets, developing policy and allocating its capital and revenue budgets.
7. By working with its communities and other organisations, the Council will:-
 - support the development of community regeneration, including through the provision of funding advice and support;
 - improve the public's understanding of, support for and involvement in the Council's activities.

Working as a Partner

8. The District Council is committed to local autonomy and wishes decision-making on matters affecting people's quality of life to take place at the most local or appropriate level.
9. In order to effectively respond to community needs and priorities, the Council:-
 - recognises its leadership role (see definition in Appendix 1) and the vital importance of working with other agencies, organisations and the community itself – this is to make best use of overall resources, harness knowledge and skills, fill gaps and avoid duplication of activity;
 - respects the contribution which others can make – eg Devon County Council, schools and colleges, South Hams Council for Voluntary Service (CVS), Town and Parish Councils, the Community Council of Devon, the Health Service and Devon & Cornwall Police;
 - endeavour to consult its partners to assess who is best placed to provide assistance when it is required;

- when considering whether it can provide support for a particular project, will consider the extent to which it accords with the Council's overall priorities;
- will encourage key organisations and stakeholders in local communities to work together to avoid an undue reliance on the Council and other agencies.

Consultation and Participation

10. The Council will work to implement its Community Consultation and Participation Policy and Strategy in order to provide for:-
- decision-making which reflects local people's priorities;
 - development of services that match local people's needs.

Delivery

11. The Council's Community Involvement Policy is practically implemented or guided by the following policies and strategies:-
- South Hams Community Strategy (published Spring 2003)
 - Communication Policy and Guide (strategy to be developed)
 - Consultation and Participation Strategy
 - Prosperity Strategy
 - AONB Management Plan
 - Housing Strategy
 - South Hams Local Plan
 - Cultural Strategy (draft being developed)
 - Grants Policy (being developed)
 - Community Services Service Plan
 - Crime and Disorder Strategy 2002 - 2003

Definition of “Community Leadership”

South Hams District Council recognises the roles which it plays as a local authority and its Members play as elected community representatives in terms of “community leadership”.

In its guide “Communicating the future – snapshots of success” published in February 2002, the Local Government Association provides the following definition of community leadership, which helps to explain the rationale behind this Community Involvement policy:-

- Listening to and involving local communities. Councils cannot call themselves leaders if they are not in touch with the communities they purport to represent;
- Building vision and direction. Local authorities want to know that all the relevant organisations in their area are working together to a common direction;
- Working effectively in partnership. Councils need to take the initiative in bringing together all the key players at local level;
- Make things happen. Delivering outcomes for local people;
- Standing up for communities. This advocacy role can involve speaking out for local people on major issues that impact on the community;
- Empowering local communities. Creating the environment in which other local leadership roles can develop and foster active citizenship;
- Accountability to communities. Being accountable to local people, via the ballot box and other relationships with local people;
- Effective use of community resources. Ensuring that a wide range of resources are used effectively to meet local priorities.