



Selby District Council

**Community Engagement Strategy  
2008-2011**

## Community Engagement Strategy September 2008

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# Community Engagement Strategy September 2008

## Introduction

Effective community engagement is about providing people with opportunities to talk to the Council about their wants and needs. This is at the heart of the national empowerment agenda. It is about:

- **working together with local people to address issues that affect them,**
- **listening to, communicating with, understanding and involving our community,**
- **putting people at the heart of all that we do.**

'Putting Customers First' is one of the seven strategic themes outlined in our Corporate Plan 2007-2011. These themes and the annual priorities that sustain them have been identified and confirmed through our many community engagement exercises. The Council is committed to providing responsive services and empowered communities whilst using community views to influence and inform decision-making.

Over the last few years we have improved the quality and quantity of our consultations, communications and community involvement. We have reached out into the community to those with whom we have never engaged before. We have widened our use of traditional and innovative engagement initiatives.

However, the Corporate Plan recognises that a broader based approach to community engagement is now needed. It commits the Council to the development of a long-term customer engagement strategy. The outcome of this strategy will be that customers feel that it is easier to communicate with the Council and access our services.

Our Corporate Plan commits the Council to empowering and engaging with our community through the development of both this strategy and our Local Strategic Partnership. The Sustainable Community Strategy 2005-2010 states that we and our partners will help people to 'take part in, influence and contribute to the future of their local community'.

This strategy will help us, and our partners, to deliver these commitments. We will also continue the progress towards strong and prosperous communities and the 'lively democratic culture' and 'community development' objectives outlined in our Ten Year Vision.

Our mission for community engagement is:

**'To engage with people as individuals, as customers and as communities to ensure that they are at the heart of our decision - making processes'**

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We are developing our community engagement mechanisms to fulfil this mission.

The outcome of this strategy will be that customers feel that it is easier to communicate with the Council and access our services.

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### The scope of our strategy

The term 'community engagement' includes a range of different activities and approaches, which are outlined in the table below. The approaches that we use will depend on certain circumstances, such as who is involved, the reasons for their involvement and what we are involving people in.

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example activities we already use</b>
<b>Informing people</b>	One way communication aiming to make the community aware of local issues and initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Website</li> <li>▪ Corporate Plan</li> <li>▪ Sustainable Community Strategy</li> <li>▪ 'Citizenlink'</li> <li>▪ Town and Parish Council newsletters</li> <li>▪ Tenants' and Citizens' Panel newsletters.</li> </ul>
<b>Consulting people</b>	Seeking the views of the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Web, telephone and postal surveys</li> <li>▪ Citizens' and tenants panels</li> <li>▪ Public meetings</li> <li>▪ Annual State of the Area Address consultations.</li> </ul>
<b>Involving, Empowering and Supporting people</b>	Involving the community in our decision-making processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tenants' Forums, Tenants and Residents Associations</li> <li>▪ Community Investment Partnership Groups (CIP)</li> <li>▪ Work closely with our thriving third sector</li> <li>▪ Urban Renaissance Town Teams</li> <li>▪ Piloting our Community Engagement Forum approach</li> <li>▪ Community Safety Joint Action Groups</li> <li>▪ Community involvement in the Local Development Framework</li> <li>▪ Town and Parish Council Forums.</li> </ul>

### The case for community engagement

#### **Why Inform people?**

Communication has a key role to play in improving community satisfaction with the Council, helping to drive cultural change and performance improvement.

#### **Why Consult with people?**

The underlying principle behind all of our consultation activities is our need to be in touch with our community. Elected councillors, as community leaders, are also a vital part of the community engagement process, consulting with and representing the views and interests of the people who live and work in their wards.

#### **Why Involve, Empower and Support people?**

By providing real opportunities for people to influence the decision-making process, we can build understanding, accountability and sustain democracy.

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These activities provide Selby District Council with the opportunity to explain and discuss our policies and proposed actions and give us the opportunity to respond to community concerns. As a result, our plans, actions or outcomes are more likely to directly meet community needs.

### **Our community engagement principles**

The following principles underpin this community engagement strategy:

#### **Building on existing strengths**

In order to make the most of resources, community engagement activities will build on Selby District Council's existing mechanisms.

#### **Appropriate and relevant**

All community engagement activity will be relevant to those involved; it will have a clear purpose and a meaningful outcome. It will relate to decisions that we have yet to make.

#### **Accessible for everyone**

Community engagement processes provide everyone who has a stake in the outcome with the opportunity to get involved, should they want to. We accept and respect the position of those who do not want to be involved in our community engagement activity.

#### **Clear and concise**

We will be clear about the purpose of community engagement activities and how they will be used to inform decisions. All communication and consultation will be clearly structured and worded.

#### **Promoting a positive approach**

Our community engagement will be a constructive process, benefiting both the Council and those engaged.

#### **Genuine and realistic**

We will be clear about what can be achieved and provide enough time for people to be involved effectively.

#### **Proactive and innovative**

Community engagement will be proactive and innovative where appropriate.

#### **Promoting ongoing community engagement**

In line with Government principles, community engagement activities will promote ongoing involvement rather than involvement in one-off activities.

#### **Providing ongoing feedback**

Community engagement will be a process of informing, consulting, supporting, involving and empowering the community. Ongoing feedback relating to community engagement will be provided.

### Our community engagement aims, achievements and objectives

#### Aim 1

**To enable an involved, empowered and active citizenship.**

#### **What we do:**

- Actively involve the community in our Local Development Framework.
- Consult with the district's businesses, thriving third sector and community groups.
- Reach out to engage those we have never involved before, for example, migrant workers through our participation in 'Selby Together' and online Polish Talking News programmes.
- Support the Community Engagement Forum pilot, the Community Investment Partnership groups, the Urban Renaissance Town Teams, the Community Safety Joint Action Groups, the Tenants' Forums and Tenants' and Residents' Associations, the Active Business Forum, the Leisure Services Users' Forum, the Food Safety Forum, the Health and Safety Forum and the Town and Parish Council Forums.
- Maintain the Selby District Council Citizens' Panel.
- Participate in the development of a Selby District Youth Council.
- Operate our Leader's online surgery.
- Support the Tenants Forum website
- Hold extensive annual consultations about the Council's priorities as part of the State of the Area Address programme.

#### **What we intend to achieve:**

- Improve the level of overall satisfaction with the Council by 2% to 52% over the next three years.
- Increase the number of residents who feel satisfied with their local area as a place to live by 3% to 75% over the next three years.
- Increase the number of residents who feel that they can influence decisions affecting their communities by 2% to 32% over the next three years.
- Increase the number of residents who feel that they can influence decisions affecting their communities as evidenced by a 3% increase in voter turn out at the next local elections.

### Aim 2

**To communicate information to our community clearly, factually and appropriately.**

Good communication is essential for improving community satisfaction with both individual service performance and the Council as a whole. Residents, customers and stakeholders require clear factual information concerning:

- which services are provided by the Council;
- how to access these services;
- news about the work of the Council and its partners;
- reasons why we have taken decisions and how the community's perspective was taken into account;
- how the Council spends its money;
- what improvements are planned;
- how to get in touch with us; and,
- how to make a complaint or submit a compliment.

#### **What we do:**

- Publicise our Corporate Plan.
- Publish our residents' newspaper, Citizenlink, Open Door, Rethink Rubbish and our Citizens' Panel and Town and Parish Council newsletters.
- Continue to widen community usage of our website [www.selby.gov.uk](http://www.selby.gov.uk)
- Support the Community Safety and CIP Group websites.
- Upload our Committee and Board agendas and minutes onto our website.
- Maintain a high profile in the local media.
- Provide access to information and services in partnership with North Yorkshire County Council at Access Selby, Sherburn in Elmet and Tadcaster.
- Introduced a Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy and procedures.
- Maintain our commitment to Plain English.
- Publish an annual community safety directory.
- Publish an annual Parish Guidebook.

#### **What we intend to achieve:**

- Increase the number of residents who think local public services keep them well informed by 2% to 52% over the next three years.

### **Aim 3**

**To improve our communication with our partners and stakeholders in order to co-ordinate our community engagement efforts.**

We need to work together with partners to ensure co-ordinated mechanisms for community engagement. It means achieving efficiencies by preventing unnecessary duplication. It means avoiding community consultation fatigue.

#### **What we do:**

- Support the development of the Local Strategic Partnership.
- Support the Tadcaster and Villages Community Engagement Forum pilot
- Participate in a consortium of local authority partners to undertake the Department for Communities and Local Government's Place Survey.
- Support a wide range of community forums and groups.
- Continue to widen community usage of our website [www.selby.gov.uk](http://www.selby.gov.uk)
- Ensure that Citizenlink, our residents' newspaper, features a balance of Council, partner and stakeholder stories.
- Publish Open Door, our tenants' magazine.
- Work with our Community Safety Partnership to publish community information.
- Produce recycling newsletters in conjunction with North Yorkshire County Council.

#### **What we intend to achieve:**

- Continue to develop and support the Local Strategic Partnership.
- Work with our partners to help to develop, maintain and support the Selby District Youth Council
- Maintain and develop the North Yorkshire, York and East Riding Community Engagement Group

### **Aim 4**

#### **To raise the image and reputation of the Council and the Selby District .**

A positive image and reputation is essential for effective community engagement.

The factors that make up the Council's reputation include:

- Our mission, themes and priorities.
- Our delivery – do we give our community what they want and what we promised them?
- Our behaviour – how we treat our customers, our staff and our councillors.
- How we go about our business – how we, our vehicles and our offices look and feel to our community and the wider regional, national and international community.

#### **What we do:**

- Maintain a national reputation for overview and scrutiny within a fourth option environment.
- Retain a national reputation for online consultations and policy deliberation.
- Ensure a high profile in the community by developing relationships with the local, regional and national media (see our Media and Communications Strategy 2008-2011)
- Offer an ongoing programme of media training for councillors and staff.
- Continue to widen community usage of our website [www.selby.gov.uk](http://www.selby.gov.uk)
- Have councillor champions for our priorities e.g. customer services, equalities and safer and stronger communities.
- Maintain a national reputation for developing our relationship with Town and Parish Councils.

#### **What we intend to achieve:**

- Continue to maintain a strong and consistent image
- Reduce the Council's exposure to risks to its image and reputation through the maintenance of risk registers.

### Aim 5

**To build a positive relationship with the media which gains coverage and raises our image.**

Most local residents gain information about the Council and its partners through the media. Selby is covered by local independent television, local BBC television and radio and a number of independent radio stations. It is served by a number of regional and geographically specific daily and weekly newspapers.

Our relationship with the media helps us to manage and improve our reputation. It helps us to promote our district locally, regionally and nationally. The media helps us to inform residents of the services we provide and any improvements to those services.

We can use the media to inform the community of the decisions we have taken. We can use the media to gauge the community's response to our services, policies, plans and strategies. The media can help nurture a sense of civic pride, district well-being and morale.

The Community Engagement Strategy complements the Media and Communications Strategy 2008-11 and supports both the internal and external aims and proposed outcomes within this strategy.

#### **What we do:**

- Maintain a high profile in the community through our relationships with the local, regional and national media.
- Offer an ongoing programme of media training for councillors and staff.
- Produce media and communications plans, which facilitate the progress of key priorities.
- Undertake Citizenlink readers' satisfaction surveys.
- Produce and implement strategies to raise awareness and understanding of the Council's priorities and key service developments.

#### **What we intend to achieve:**

- Increase the amount of positive media coverage received as a % of the total coverage received over the next three years.
- Increase the number of residents who are satisfied with the way the authority runs things by 2% to 52% over the next three years.

### **Aim 6**

**To enable every councillor to maximise their role as elected representatives and community leaders as outlined in the Constitution.**

The primary role of a councillor is to represent their ward and the community. The Corporate Plan and other documents contain the key messages that councillors need to communicate to the community. The Council demonstrates its commitment to investing in councillors through briefings, training and development opportunities.

#### **What we do:**

- Undertake programmes of training for councillors.
- Undertake Leadership Academy training for our councillors.
- Undertake media training for Councillors.
- Support councillors wishing to manage their own websites.
- Issue regular directories of councillors to the community.
- Have councillor champions for our priorities e.g. community safety, local needs housing and older people.
- Produce SDC Voice to help councillors and staff to focus on key messages and successes.

#### **What we intend to achieve:**

- Support councillors in their role by ensuring they feel that the information that they receive is appropriate, accessible, understandable, well presented, timely and accurate.

### Aim 7

**To ensure that every member of staff understands the Council's Ten Year Vision, mission, themes and priorities.**

Our staff are our ambassadors to the community. By ensuring that our staff are well informed we can empower them to transmit our key messages and successes through their interactions with the community. Excellent internal communication involves regular and effective two-way communication. The Community Engagement Strategy complements the Media and Communications Strategy 2008-12 and supports both the internal and external aims and proposed outcomes contained within the Media and Communications Strategy.

#### **What we do:**

- Produce monthly Team Briefs and bi monthly to help councillors and staff to focus on key messages and successes.
- Hold regular Birthday Forums for staff.
- Undertake an ongoing programme of managers' conferences.
- Provide information to our staff via our shared computer folders, such as a corporate library of documents, news and press releases.
- Publish our Corporate Plan.
- Undertake regular surveys into staff attitudes and opinions.
- Hold corporate sessions on key strategic issues.
- Publish several staff information newsletters, such as those relating to Finance Services and benefit fraud.
- Provide Plain English, equalities and other training.
- Undertake staff surveys relating to the future direction, policies and strategies of the Council.
- Undertake an ongoing programme of staff training hours.

#### **What we intend to achieve:**

- Ensure that information is provided to staff to enhance understanding of the strategic themes and priorities of the authority and how their role contributes to those themes.
- Ensure that all staff feel that the information that they receive about the Council is appropriate, accessible, understandable, well presented, timely and accurate.
- Ensure that Selby District Council speaks with a single voice to our community.

## Community Engagement Strategy September 2008

If you would like this document in a different format, for example: large print, audio, Braille or in another language, please contact:

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We welcome your feedback. If you wish to make any comments on this strategy, or for more information on the Council's community engagement activities, you can contact us in the following ways:

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