

ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

IMPLEMENTING A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH IN HEREFORDSHIRE

Introduction

A number of mechanisms currently exist in Herefordshire for local people to be involved in, or contribute to, decision making processes that influence the way the public sector delivers its services. These mechanisms have been considered in the development of a partnership engagement framework. They include, amongst others, community led planning, Reaching the Hearts of Herefordshire, PACTS, ward councillors, the Local Involvement Network (LINK), Parish Councils, children and young people's forums, scrutiny committees/councillor call for action and local regeneration partnerships.

This document sets out a proposed way forward for both Herefordshire Public Services (HPS) and the wider Herefordshire Partnership in pursuit of the County's long term aim of putting its communities first and at the heart of improving local service delivery. This forms part of the delivery plan for the new Locality Strategy.

Background

It's important to have stronger, more resilient communities and a representative community engagement process, which can take community views to the different levels of the Partnership and feedback on progress and outcomes. The Partnership is striving for a vibrant and dynamic dialogue with communities (of interest and of place), where residents contribute to the decisions that are made about their neighbourhoods and involved in evaluating the success of local initiatives.

In April 2010 Herefordshire Partnership embarked on the development of an engagement framework with the intention of creating a real platform for collaboration and sharing resources in defined localities. The aim is to ensure local people receive information on what is happening that may affect them, what is available for them and how they can be involved in and have influence on future activities.

Taking forward the existing engagement strategies of both Herefordshire Partnership and Herefordshire Public Services and producing a collaborative document clearly setting out an agreed approach to engagement was a key action in the Partnership's development plan for 2010.

The Herefordshire Public Services (HPS) Steering Group approved a framework known as the HPS Community Engagement Strategy in December 2008. This document replaced Herefordshire Council's Community Involvement Strategy and Council/PCT Involving People Strategy. This strategy and its supporting action plan need to be reviewed and updated in light of recent government and organisational changes.

The HPS Customer Strategy puts citizens of the County at the heart of service improvement and efficiency and sets out the specific direction for the development of all opportunities for customer contact. The strategy

acknowledges the need to know and understand customers and what services they need or require as well as developing regular engagement and dialogue so that they are at the centre of customer-led service provision. It has 4 key aims – informed services, accessible services, listening services, and trusted services. The partnership framework reflects the aims and principles of this strategy.

A tiered approach to service delivery in 9 localities across the County has been established by HPS. The localities are based on the Civil Parish boundaries that form the secondary school catchment areas. These will form the basis for engagement for the wider partnership and provide the opportunity for public sector services to deliver joined-up customer access points for local people.

The Herefordshire Partnership engagement framework brings together existing and planned Council and NHS resources and strategic priorities detailed in the HPS engagement and customer strategies in support of the implementation of the wider partnership framework aligned to the 9 localities.

The Herefordshire context

There are a number of key strategic developments and reviews currently underway through Herefordshire Public Services and Herefordshire Partnership in relation to improving the methods of community engagement and making better use of resources.

Within the overall context of delivering the strategic priorities of the Sustainable Community Strategy, Herefordshire Partnership has agreed that community engagement and empowerment is a key driver and measure of success that can produce:

- Stronger communities with resilient social networks and active citizens taking responsibility for their own well-being.
- Excellent services that are informed and influenced by communities so that they meet needs effectively and efficiently.
- Vibrant and representative democracy that is improved through active participation.

The Partnership commissioned a Local Improvement Adviser via the West Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership between April and December 2010 to develop a partnership wide engagement framework that:

- Offers platforms for sharing and aligning resources in each of the 9 localities across the County to support the delivery of the engagement framework.
- Has clearly defined and understood mechanisms and tools of engagement relevant to and effective in each locality that build on successes to date.

Engagement from the Partnership's perspective is about developing and maintaining relationships between public agencies and the local communities they serve. Developing a dialogue - listening, talking, working together, learning and being seen to respond - so that people are involved in addressing the issues that impact on their lives and feel they are able to influence service providers and vice versa.

This dialogue should also include the private sector and voluntary and community organisations in the locality – taking a whole community approach to devising and delivering local solutions.

A review of support services for the third sector The Interim Third Sector Strategic Board has recently completed by Herefordshire Public Services in partnership with support organisations currently in receipt of funding. The outcomes from this review will be improved coverage of infrastructure support through greater collaboration between existing organisations and cutting out duplication.

Herefordshire Council is currently working with Parish and Town councils on the process for developing and implementing a charter setting out how the Councils in Herefordshire will work together to improve the system of local democracy, increase public participation and deliver improved services.

Herefordshire Public Services transformation programme “Rising to the Challenge” aims to deliver innovative projects and programmes through 5 workstreams. These seek to achieve greater integration of services and increased efficiency and productivity across Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire.

Through joined up service delivery and locality working key objectives of Communities First, one of the 5 workstreams are:

- Better engagement
- Localised services
- Empowered communities

The intended benefits arising from this workstream and the wider partnership framework can jointly be summarised as:

- Communities being able to influence, shape and deliver services and a consequential improvement in commissioning.
- Reduced demand for higher cost interventions as a result of the improved co-ordination of services across all partners in all sectors.
- Developing stronger, more cohesive communities who are healthier and happier

The National Picture

The Big Society aims to put the community at the heart of taking action in their area by encouraging volunteering and involvement in social action, making funds available for social projects through the Big Society Bank, giving communities a greater say over local planning and saving local services, piloting a new National Citizen Service for 16 year olds, creating trained community organisers and giving a general power of competence to local councils.

The recently published Localism Bill sets out a radical shift of power from central government to local communities with the intention of:

- Giving local authorities new freedoms and flexibilities,
- New rights and powers for communities
- Reform to make the planning system clearer, more democratic and effective,
- Reform to ensure that decisions about housing are taken locally

The essential actions (summarised above) aim to shift power away from central and local government, and move it back to people and communities

It will be essential for there to be local collaboration and conversations with communities to identify and agree the red tape which is considered to be costly, unnecessary and restricting local action. This will create the right environment and give the right messages about involving local people directly in what happens in their community.

One of the challenges will be around gaining consensus of all interested and democratically elected parties about what red tape should be removed. Another is about how these freedoms and flexibilities will be managed to ensure all voices are heard.

More decisions will be taken within communities about how public money is spent and raised. This will give people more choice and a better standard of service as the way public services are delivered changes. These actions are central to the government's plan to sustain the proposed decentralisation.

Information should be made available to local people about how money is being spent and used, and what difference it is making to them and the wider community. Local government will be held more accountable to its communities. This will give local people opportunities to take control of the process of decentralisation.

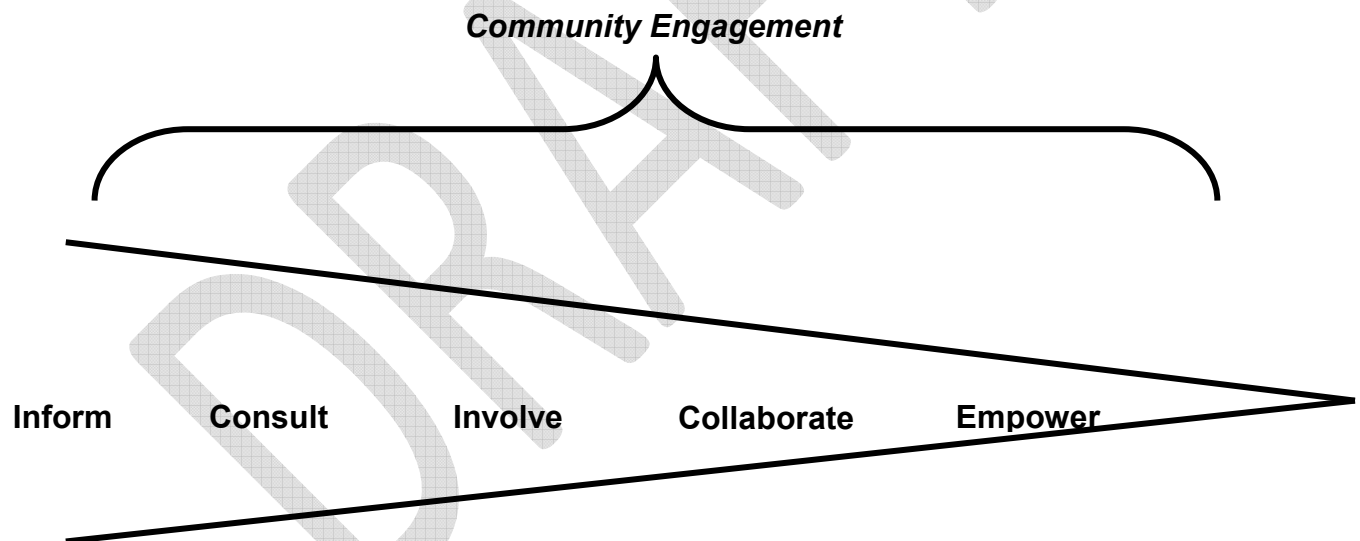
A Partnership with Herefordshire People – “Beyond engagement”

Community engagement – why do we do it?

- **Democracy:** participation is an aspect of democracy that complements the representative democratic process.
- **Design:** building in customer insight with local data and the knowledge of professionals, leads to more effectively designed services.
- **Development:** communities are given an opportunity to tap into their natural resources and become more self-reliant and sustainable.
- **Well-being:** involved and engaged communities are more satisfied with services which meet their needs.

Community engagement – what do we mean?

Community engagement takes place across a spectrum, which is reflected in the diagram below. Moving from left to right across the spectrum, the level of intensity increases (and the numbers involved tend to decrease). Healthy engagement is able to demonstrate effective impact at every stage.



The following definitions (from the International Association for Public Participation) explain what is meant when engaging at the different levels shown on the spectrum above:

- *Inform:* to provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and /or solutions.
- *Consult:* to obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and / or decisions. Feed back on the results of consultation.

- *Involve*: to work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
- *Collaborate*: to partner with the public in each aspect of decision-making including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.
- *Empower*: to place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

Beyond engagement in Herefordshire

Reflecting on the national context, local priorities and the revisions to the Sustainable Community Strategy (particularly in relation to stronger communities) the following offer is proposed to bring about a change in the way we work in partnership with and support Herefordshire's communities.

Herefordshire's vision

To work closely with Herefordshire people as partners to build empowered communities across the County able to take responsibility for their own well being

What are our objectives?

By taking a joint approach to engagement and working in partnership with Herefordshire's communities in the 9 localities the following will be achieved:

- 1 **More participation by local people...** in decision making as a resident or as a service user, and in local democratic processes
- 2 **More responsive services...** from greater participation, personalisation and choice, delivering services closer to communities.
- 3 **Better decisions by involving local people...** in locality based partnerships, and in town and parish councils through participatory budgeting
- 4 **Empowered communities...** taking advantage of opportunities presented through the Localism Bill, right to buy, neighbourhood planning
- 5 **Improved service quality...** localising service delivery reflecting community choice and need
- 6 **Stronger role for Elected Members....** as advocates, community leaders and co-ordinators of local action
- 7 **An increase in respect and understanding...** through more citizenship activities and volunteering
- 8 **Participation from all parts of the community...** supporting the seldom heard voices and focusing on vulnerable groups
- 9 **A change in the culture of the public sector workforce....** developing a 'no wrong person' culture across all front line staff.
- 10 **Improved well-being....**through an inclusive process that results in communities being more satisfied with services they receive

What will be our outcomes?

Local communication

- Choice of communication channels
- Strengthened role for elected members and town and parish councillors
- Single communication hub for all partners
- Single information point for communities

Local involvement

- By residents, customers, and communities
- By elected members and town and parish councillors
- By local businesses
- By local voluntary and community groups

Local engagement

- In 9 localities
- Building on what's already there
- Through a joint approach across all sectors
- Flexible approach reflecting local communities

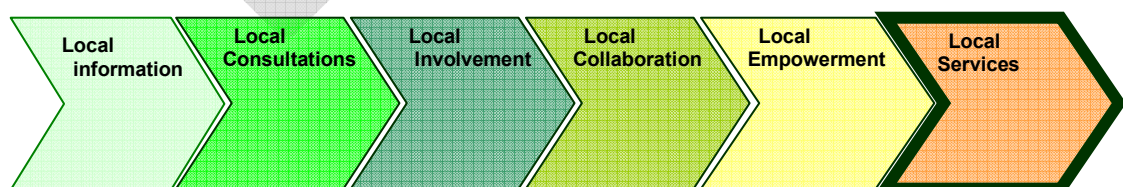
Local empowerment

- More decisions taken by communities
- More people voting in elections
- Services, budgets and decisions devolved to communities

Local services

- Co-design of services involving communities (residents, groups and businesses)
- Different delivery solutions commissioned by public sector
- More services delivered or organised by town and parish councils, local organisations and local businesses
- Using participatory budgeting to encourage communities to get involved

stronger communities



How will this change the way we work?

As a partnership.....

The review of Herefordshire Partnership is in part a response to the coalition government's spending review and departmental reforms. However, it also fundamentally reflects the desire locally to focus on people and places and move away from the performance management of national indicators.

The Board has agreed that it needs to focus on greater joint planning and simplify its governance structures. This can be achieved through the development of shared services around intelligence and commissioning and putting in place an effective, streamlined partnership structure that is able to work with communities (local people, groups, organisations and businesses) and parishes with higher levels of need.

Moving away from the traditional thematic approach to locality based partnerships in 9 areas, the revised structure will connect to the emerging statutory Health and Well Being Board and bring a locality dimension to revitalising the local economy.

As an organisation.....

Organisational changes and the subsequently revised policy frameworks, planning processes and workforce requirements will need to consider the benefits of devolution (of decisions, services, budgets) and the vision of empowering Herefordshire's communities through working in partnership with them. Key to this is the change needed in what many consider to be their organisation's greatest asset – their workforce.

Creating a culture of 'no wrong person' by developing front line workers as facilitators will encourage communities to realise their natural strengths and start to move away from public sector dependency.

Local government in particular, and increasingly other public and private sector organisations potentially as the concept of community budgets develops, will need to strengthen the representational role of elected members and consider how they are supported in their development as community leaders, working with the grassroots elected parish and town councillors.

With the community.....

Reaching the Hearts of Herefordshire gave a taste of the potential of local democracy married with the public sector focusing on a geographic area and getting the community involved and taking ownership of local issues. This will need to be broadened to engage with local businesses.

Locality based partnerships offer the opportunity to change the face of democracy, get local people and businesses involved and strengthen the role of town and parish councils as decision making mechanisms in their area.

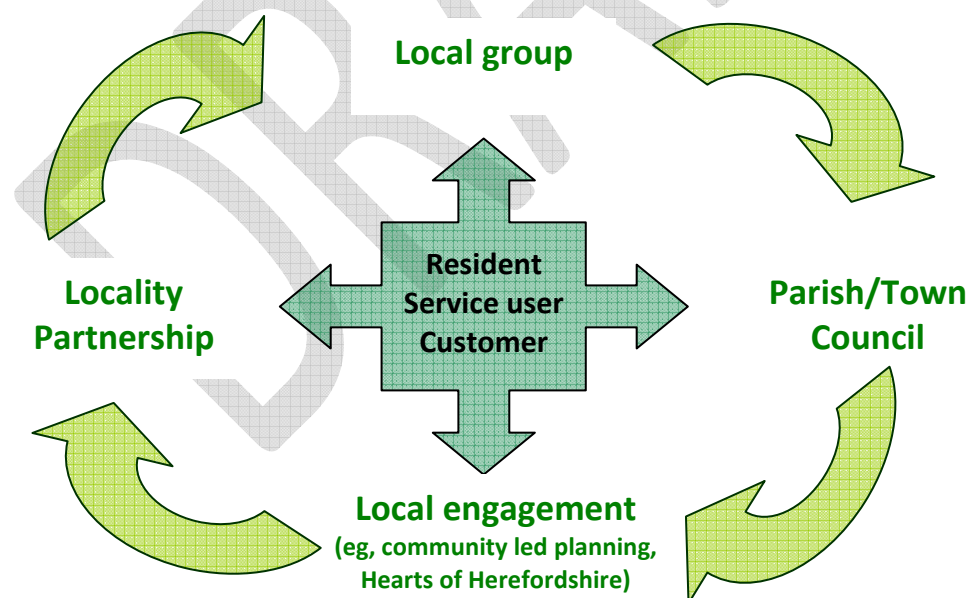
It could be argued there is an assumption in government reforms such as the Localism Bill and ideals like The Big Society that the community will take ownership and responsibility by getting involved, having a say and taking action themselves. This will change the nature of the public, private and voluntary sector's relationship with communities. Support through third sector infrastructure organisations and utilising tools such as participatory budgeting and needs analysis will be needed to enable this change.

What action will we take?

As a partnership.....

Building on the success demonstrated through existing structures such as Parish and Town Councils and initiatives such as 'Reaching the Hearts of Herefordshire' and local regeneration partnerships, we will:

- Develop Reaching the Hearts of Herefordshire across the County as a model of engaging local leaders with service providers and the community.
- Implement 9 locality based partnerships to bring together key partners (such as GPs, Headteachers, local businesses, Police, Fire, third sector, HPS) with Elected Members, Parish/Town Councils and other community representatives.
- Promote and support the development and use of community led planning and participatory budgeting as key tools to enable community action and community influence.
- Facilitate the development and implementation of locality profiles and plans through the proposed shared intelligence function.
- Support the devolution of decisions, budgets and services through a partnership commissioning framework and plan that will influence and shape individual organisation's policy frameworks and associated strategies.



County-wide partnership

What action will we take?

As organisations.....

Organisational development as part of the major change programmes underway (specifically in the public sector) to release the potential of all front line workers, including:

- Building time for partnership working into all job descriptions and induction processes
- Developing the engagement techniques and interpersonal skills of front line workers – resulting in a culture of ‘no wrong person’
- Developing front line workers as facilitators to encourage communities to realise their natural strengths and move away from public sector dependency
- Raising the profile of volunteering and the opportunities available in communities
- Raising the profile of Parish and Town councils as leaders of their communities
- Exploring the potential of rolling out Herefordshire Council’s volunteering policy

Identifying a senior manager for each locality to act as a strategic lead and build relationships with key partners.

Creating virtual teams to work in partnership with communities, develop local capacity (in individuals and groups) and support the delivery of local action.

Our local measures of success

- Number of local solutions led by the community
- Number of Town and Parish Councils involved in Reaching the Hearts of Herefordshire
- Number of Town and Parish Councils involved in locality based partnerships
- Number of staff volunteering from the public sector
- % of community in a locality volunteering
- % of local residents involved with their Parish or Town Council
- % of local residents engaged with Reaching the Hearts of Herefordshire
- % of residents feeling they can influence decisions affecting them/their area
- Improved satisfaction rates
- Voter turnout at elections
- Number of times participatory budgeting has been used to engage residents and service users
- Number of Parish Plans produced/reviewed
- Locality plans and profiles produced
- Policy plans and frameworks produced that enable community empowerment through engagement

Summary

This framework for Herefordshire goes beyond engagement. It will create the climate and offer the ability to empower our communities to take action in their communities. Changing the culture within communities and individual organisations will take time. The actions detailed in this document need to be implemented as part of wider change programmes being implemented across the County. By doing this, we will deliver sustainable change that realises the potential in our communities – residents, community and voluntary groups, elected members, town and parish councils.