

# Ellesmere Port

Community Engagement

# Toolkit

Visit: [cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/  
visiting/our\\_place](http://cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/visiting/our_place)



# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Principles of Engagement in Ellesmere Port</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Consulting</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1.1	Think it through	2	10.1	Training residents	12
1.1.2	What works	2	10.2	Residents Panels	12
1.1.3	Think long term	2	10.2.1	Planning	12
1.1.4	Change minds	2	10.2.2	Administration	12
1.1.5	Support people working together	3	10.3	Surveys	12
1.1.6	Involve people	3	10.3.1	When to use a survey	12
			10.3.2	Carrying out a survey	12
<b>2</b>	<b>What is community engagement and why should we do it?</b>	<b>4</b>	10.4	Face to face interviews	13
2.1	The Benefits of Community Engagement and Empowerment	4	10.5	Focus Groups	14
			10.5.1	Planning	14
			10.5.2	On the day	14
<b>3</b>	<b>Planning</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Informing</b>	<b>15</b>
3.1	Practicalities	5	11.1	Adverts and Posters	15
<b>4</b>	<b>Organising events</b>	<b>6</b>	11.2	Newsletters and leaflets	16
4.1	Planning	6	11.3	Electronic communications	17
4.2	Preparation	6	<b>12</b>	<b>Involving</b>	<b>17</b>
4.3	Participants needs	6	12.1	Public and open meetings	17
4.4	Holding an accessible meeting	7	12.1.1	Planning	18
4.5	Facilitation	7	12.1.2	Delivery	18
4.5.1	Planning	8	12.2	Workshops	18
4.5.2	On the day	8	12.2.1	Planning	19
4.5.3	Facilitator behaviour	8	12.2.2	Carrying it out	19
<b>5</b>	<b>Working with Diverse Groups</b>	<b>9</b>	12.3	Participatory Appraisal	19
<b>6</b>	<b>Coordinating Community Engagement</b>	<b>9</b>	12.4	Appreciative inquiry	20
<b>7</b>	<b>The role of Elected Members</b>	<b>10</b>	12.5	Planning for Real	20
<b>8</b>	<b>Monitoring, Evaluation and Review</b>	<b>10</b>	12.6	Development Trusts	21
<b>9</b>	<b>Practical Issues</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Collaborating and Empowering</b>	<b>22</b>

There are a number of principles of community engagement that will guide our approach, and those of our partners. In this document we set out six guiding principles of community engagement that we expect to adhere to. For local people and community groups, these six guiding principles can be a model against which our actions, and the actions of our partners can be assessed.

However, whilst we see our six guiding principles of community engagement as being crucial to the achievement of effective engagement, we will take a flexible approach to how they are delivered, adjusting our methods to suit the needs and opportunities of the local area and people.

**Our six guiding principles for effective engagement are:**

## 1.1.1 THINK IT THROUGH

Community involvement is most effective when it is well thought out and contributes at an early stage to the overall vision for Ellesmere Port.

It should not be an afterthought or an adjunct to the main action, and it is vital that early thought is given to how we work with communities.

It needs to be integral and a permanent thread that runs through all of the processes involved from planning, development and regeneration to maintenance, service delivery and governance. The community should reasonably expect and be encouraged to be continuously involved in offering their positive views about how their locality is shaping over time.

Whilst community engagement is the responsibility of all agencies involved, the council (through the Our Place Team) has the democratic mandate to lead and coordinate community engagement.

## 1.1.2 WHAT WORKS

The Port has a long history of consultation and involvement. Some projects have succeeded better than others. Success has been dependent on a number of factors; firstly at the beginning of the engagement there is need to be clear about what you are trying to achieve, how you will achieve it and how you will know whether you have done so.

The target audience needs to be ascertained and what you want from them. Different groups respond to different involvement incentives. Is it more important for example for you to get a 'tick in the box' support from a large number of individual members of the public, or detailed written responses to specific questions from a small number of wellinformed groups of people?

It is also important at this stage to set effective and clear ground rules with the community and partners, including defining boundaries and agreeing contacts for strands of activity and seek to agree how community engagement will genuinely capture the views of different groups of people and communities.

## 1.1.3 THINK LONG TERM

Many projects do not solve things overnight. Sometimes projects span a number of cycles of both staff and residents. It is essential therefore to agree a series of baseline measurements on engagement to provide the evidence base for the community engagement work to enable you to monitor, measure your progress and learn from the experience for future projects.

It is also important to leave a positive legacy to make it easier for those who need to work with the community in future.

## 1.1.4 CHANGE MINDS

Any engagement project is an opportunity to change the minds of residents. This means building up on the aspirations of residents and improving confidence and skills levels. The more successful projects have put in place a plan for how strategies for community engagement will be delivered and coordinated.

Increased involvement also means that people can get involved in local projects, cementing their bond with an area and promoting well-being.

### 1.1.5 SUPPORT PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER

Community engagement is about supporting local people working together to solve problems and discuss issues. Elected representatives have a vital role to play in this, and councillors can act as community leaders bridging the gap between the council and the local community.

Over the course of the next decade, a number of changes are likely to occur in Ellesmere Port that will impact on the way that the community operates. Addressing the changes will require strong local leaders able to listen to their community and bring partners together to implement a shared vision of how they can improve their areas.

Again it is important to use different models and techniques of community engagement to ensure that people have equal opportunities to take part, concentrating on particularly under represented and vulnerable groups as well as estate-specific communities.

Everyone in the communities that partners work with should have the opportunity to engage at the level and at the time they want.

Bear in mind that people have the right not to engage or get involved but need up-to-date, accessible information in order to make that choice.

### 1.1.6 INVOLVE PEOPLE

In any project it is necessary to involve the right people. This is achieved through local intelligence and knowledge and by finding the facts about the community in which the project is being held.

For example, partners need to identify who you want to engage with, which community and voluntary organisations are helpful, whether any community engagement has already taken place in the area, what capacity the community has to get involved and what are the gaps.

Where there are new or emerging communities, it will be necessary to agree who will be engaged on their behalf. The role of the community voluntary and faith sectors is very important here. They are a great vehicle for adding value and securing a contribution from groups who may have been traditionally excluded. The involvement of people is also crucial in the journey towards real co-production of services.

The council's Engagement Strategy acknowledges that community engagement can mean different things to different people, different communities and different services and situations. **In light of this, and for this document:**

**Community engagement** is the involvement of communities in influencing the outcomes and decisions that are important to them. It involves local people and groups, stakeholders and public organisations working together to identify issues, needs and aspirations and agreeing an acceptable approach to finding solutions and achieving their aspirations.

**Community empowerment** furthers this by building confidence, skills, and the power of communities to influence and take decisions about services and initiatives that affect them and to design their own solutions.

The council recognises that the area is made up of a range of different communities.

**Indeed Ellesmere Port has a number of communities:**

**Community of Place** – A community linked to a particular geographical location such as ward, parish, neighbourhood or a housing estate. This location will usually have physical boundaries

**Community of Interest** – A group of people with a shared interest, experience or need, such as a group of allotment holders.

**Community of Identity** – A community that is defined by how people identify themselves or how they are identified by society such as older people.

**Community of Faith** – A community of those who share a common religious belief.

People usually see themselves as belonging to one community of place but more than one community of interest or identity. In order to ensure true engagement and empowerment activities and opportunities need to consider this.

### 2.1 The Benefits of Community Engagement and Employment

Community engagement is an important and increasingly required element of work in Ellesmere Port. By working with local people, services can be further developed and targeted where they are most needed.

Barriers can be broken down, trust and confidence built and bridges created between service providers and those on the receiving end.

National evidence and local experience demonstrate that there are considerable benefits to public services, local people, communities and service users when effective and genuine community engagement takes place.

**These benefits include:**

**Community Leadership** - the council and ward councillors are better able to fulfil their community leadership roles by making sure everyone has a chance to contribute to and benefit from our society.

**Service Improvement** - Innovation, Quality and Cost - engagement and involvement in the design and development of services can bring a greater degree of creativity and innovation.

It enables services to be specifically geared to meet needs more effectively. This is especially relevant for marginalised and vulnerable people and communities.

**Local democracy** - by enabling people to become involved in local decision making, through a range of relevant and accessible engagement activities, we encourage people to become part of the bigger democratic process. Informed and active citizens are more likely to consider being involved in local governance such as standing as a councillor or school governor.

**Stronger and more cohesive communities** - effective engagement stimulates the increase and development of valuable community networks and the mixing of different sections of the community and provides the glue essential for strong and cohesive communities. Good engagement activities can bring a sense of belonging, identify conflict and help provide a structure to tackle community tensions.

Community engagement is about providing opportunities for people to be involved in making Ellesmere Port a better place. This is achieved in a range of ways that include providing people with information, researching needs, consulting or involving people in developing and running services.

Whatever you want to do, the key to any successful project is planning. There is often a temptation to ignore the planning phase in order to get on with the work; a robust, well thought out plan will however save you time, money and many problems throughout the project.

### 3.1 Practicalities

Whatever engagement activity you hope to do, it is very important to plan it effectively and be able to learn from the experience.

Planning and evaluation go hand in hand. Don't forget to look at existing engagement to help your planning.

**Below are key points to consider when planning a community engagement initiative of any type:**

- Why you are you planning this initiative and what will the outcomes be?
- Be clear on who you will be reaching and what needs / requirements they may have.
- Identify your stakeholders or the people you'll be working with and get in contact early.
- Identify what your initiative will mean for the people involved. What are the benefits? What are the time commitments? Has the idea come from you? What is the basis for your proposal?
- Set up a communication plan and identify how you will promote and market what you plan to do.
- Make sure that your information is clear, honest, and easily accessible.
- Always take into account diversity and equality principles. If in doubt, ask someone.
- Is your initiative long term or short term? Or is it testing the waters?
- What resources are needed?
- Respond to issues as they come up and keep an open mind.
- Always be willing to learn different perspectives and be honest when you are not sure of something.
- Inform those involved regularly and remind them when meetings will be. Communicate the outcomes of engagement.
- Remember the procedures, such as Health and Safety at a meeting and build them in to remind yourself.
- Keep good records of your planning process and what happened throughout the initiative. It always helps when looking back at the end.
- Make sure you are ready to communicate clearly, concisely and honestly.

### 4.1 Planning

Before starting any meeting for community engagement purposes, you should be able to answer these questions.

- Why are you having your meeting?
- What do you want to get out of the meeting?
- What will you be talking about?
- How will the discussion be carried out?
- How long will it be?
- How will you invite people?

- Who will you invite?
- What will you need to talk about to get the information required?
- Are there certain methods that would be better to use than others and how can they be used?
- What local knowledge would be helpful? Are there any particular activities, issues or concerns that may impact on your meeting?

It is often helpful to plan with other people. That way they can give you feedback and ideas that you might not have thought of. Always try to do new and different things to engage with people and remember it may be best to keep everything simple.

### 4.2 Preparation

It is worth visiting your meeting space a few days before hand to get a feel for where you will be working. Then on the day, arrive with enough time before the meeting to prepare yourself.

- Know any safety issues that need to be run through (if you are there for a whole day especially). What would you do if the meeting had to be evacuated?
- Know where the toilets are.
- Know when refreshments will be arriving (have you checked all dietary requirements?)
- Double check your list of attendees, are there enough seats?
- Check the power to make sure everything works and make sure that the room is clearly signposted if need be.
- Look at the layout of the room. Would it be easy to move around in if you were in a wheelchair? Or if you have a guide dog?
- Try to avoid podiums, they can be threatening
- Try to use round tables and be ready to break up into smaller groups if need be.

### 4.3 Participants needs

- Are there any dietary requirements?
- Are all disability considerations addressed? For example, for the deaf community.
- Are all language considerations addressed?
- Have you booked the meeting at an appropriate time?
- How will you feedback your information?

## 4.4 Holding an Accessible Meeting

The following is designed to help you ensure that your meeting meets good practice standards on access and that disabled people are not excluded from attending and contributing to meetings.

### Checklist prior to meeting

- Car parking and drop off points are available.
- Physically accessible venue booked.
- Outside area suitable for guide dogs' exercise and toilet needs at break times.
- Sufficient circulation space within training room.
- Adequate space and facilities for support workers / personal assistants.
- Breakout or syndicate rooms for small group work to avoid noise levels of groups working in same large room.
- Accessible toilets, ideally on same floor/level as training room.
- Variety of seating types available.
- Layout of the room in relation to light sources; avoid bright lights / uncovered windows directly behind either trainers or participants.
- Ask for all external lighting and lighting from the entrance to the meeting room to remain on throughout any evening meetings.
- Consult deaf participants about positioning of interpreters and / or microphones for induction loop systems.
- British Sign Language (BSL) or other signers should be made available on request. Booking a BSL interpreter can take days or sometimes weeks due to short supply of interpreters, so make sure you allow plenty of time for this.

If your meeting is likely to go on for more than an hour, book two or more interpreters, as interpreters will need a break after 20 minutes.

### During meetings

- You may want to read out content of overhead projections, PowerPoint presentations and flipcharts.
- Don't speak or deliver a presentation too fast. Give people time to absorb what you have said, but don't deliver information in a patronising manner by going too slowly.
- Never assume someone will not understand what you are trying to communicate.
- Always show respect and be patient.
- If using power point presentation, ensure that the text is not obscured by bold background image or colour.
- Use black or very dark blue flipchart pens / board markers for maximum contrast and read out flipchart content.
- Ensure you face the group when talking (including when using flipchart and / or OHP), don't cover mouth with hands or pens.
- Breaks every two hours should be considered, especially when you have lip-readers or people who use BSL, as it can be tiring to read lips or signing for a long time.
- Offer assistance in filling in forms. Never allow someone to sign something if they are not sure they want to or if they think they don't understand it.

## 4.5 Facilitation

A facilitator is a person who makes something possible or easier. Good facilitation is a skill used in many different situations. You can act as a facilitator in a meeting, a series of meetings throughout a project, or at workshops. Facilitation is a vital part of community engagement as it ensures everyone can play a part.

A facilitator holds a large degree of responsibility and it can be a challenging task. Within a community engagement context, you may be required to facilitate between young people on one day, older people the next, or you may need to facilitate discussion between the two groups in the same room.

Facilitation takes time and practice to learn and to get right. Every group of people has different needs and requirements.

Good facilitation involves planning, understanding your audience, being adaptive, open-minded and ready for anything. The points below are a guide to help you facilitate. You could bring in a trained facilitator if you have the resources or you could attend training courses to develop your facilitation skills.

### 4.5.1 PLANNING

- Plan your session. Who is coming, where will the meeting or session take place and how will people get there?
- Set out the objectives or purpose of the session. What is it that you want to achieve and how will decisions be made? What approach will best suit the participants?
- Gather the information needed. Who is coming and what is the relationship of the attendants? Is there a history of conflict? Are some people more confident than others?
- Set out the agenda or format of the session. Is the meeting to be around a table in a formal chairing session? Will people break up into groups and give feedback? Will there be presentations carried out by other people and what do they need?
- What equipment will you need?
- Do the people coming have any special needs such as dietary requirements?
- Remember logistics of the day. How will you get there, what time will food or refreshments arrive, will you need help setting up technical equipment or getting equipment to the location?
- Look at what has happened before and what information you may need from other meetings.

This planning stage is very important. It may help if you refer to the presentation section of this toolkit. Always give yourself plenty of time to plan your session and arrive early on the day.

### 4.5.2 ON THE DAY

- Set out the objectives for the day clearly.
- You may want to set out ground rules.
- Run through health and safety, toilets, refreshment times.
- Clearly set out the context, does everyone know why he or she is there?
- Set out how the day will run. How long will people be there? What time will lunch be? What will the day involve?

- Keep any eye on the atmosphere. Are people enjoying themselves? Are the objectives being met? Are actions being set out with responsibilities? Are there tensions between attendants?
- Ensure everyone can participate.

### 4.5.3 FACILITATOR BEHAVIOUR

A facilitator may have to act slightly differently in different situations according to the requirements of the meeting and the people there. One of the most important things to be is you.

#### Some effective facilitation points are:

- Use humour (if appropriate).
- Summarise and communicate.
- Lead, but don't take over.
- Maintain objectivity.
- Listen and observe the feel of the day.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Build on points as they develop.
- Offer praise and support.
- Be assertive, not aggressive.
- Listen to what people say.
- Be observant. Especially of the time!
- Listen to points raised and don't interrupt.
- Treat participants equally.
- Practice a five-to-one ratio of appreciation to criticism.
- Encourage participants.

A facilitator has to be creative, flexible and adaptive. You must meet the challenges when facilitating a group of people, who can be very different.

How do you deal with a group who remains silent despite the questions being posed? How do you deal with someone who talks all the time or others that won't talk? What does a facilitator do when too many hands go up, or when the group is just not engaged?

A well-practiced facilitator overcomes all these situations and is always learning.

## 5 Working with Diverse Groups

The Ellesmere Port community is made up of different groups. Some of these are easier to engage with than others, and many have a history of little or no involvement.

Developing a wider understanding of the different communities will lend legitimacy to any engagement project, and ensure that you can reach into the different communities.

### Some steps to engage different communities include:

- Advertising community events through channels that traditionally excluded people can access;
- Developing relationships with the different communities. There are usually opportunities for example to meet newly emerging communities at cafes or shops.

- Working with outreach or community workers who have a more detailed knowledge of the different communities;
- Linking in events with special events or celebratory days;
- Be aware of some of the cultural issues that exist in, for example the Gypsy and Traveller communities.

In Ellesmere Port agencies have found that unusual and attractive events have been successful. A local barbeque for example attracted a large number of residents.

## 6 Coordinating Community Engagement

Very often the community engagement process will be undertaken with a requirement or expectation that a set of agreed actions are produced. These actions can be put together in an action plan as a reference and evaluation aid. The impact of the actions undertaken will result in beneficial outcomes for a neighbourhood or community.

The production of agreed decisions and future things to do in the action plan is essential to maintain interest in participation and ensure long term success.

An individual at any meeting should take specific responsibility to record and minute proceedings and produce an action plan. Clarity concerning the purpose of the meeting or event is therefore essential.

The application of **SMART principles** is often used in action planning. **These are:**

- **SPECIFIC** - have an agreed understanding of outcomes. Make sure all involved are clear what is intended.
- **MEASURABLE** - have outcomes which can show a measured improvement or clearly understood positive impact.
- **ACHIEVABLE** – present the outcomes as within the capabilities of all involved to deliver.
- **REALISTIC** - make sense given the time and resources which are known to be available.

- **TIMED** – be clear about the time needed to deliver and monitor this at agreed intervals.

Delivery of the action plan is a success factor which underpins continued involvement of participants in the engagement process.

Joint Working is important in many community engagement projects. In any joint working arrangements there is a need to ensure a method of talking which allows equal access for all involved and promotes a wide understanding of the issues and what may well be the different perspectives of a range of stakeholders.

Coordination of the agreed process of engagement may often be led by officers but this benefits from the principle of empowerment, i.e., share out responsibilities, encourage contributions from everyone involved which all goes to build up trust in the process.

The council is setting up a Community Service Scrutiny Panel with members from each of the ten neighbourhoods. Their role in the new approach in Cheshire West and specifically in Ellesmere Port will need them to have a clear idea of service priorities and to be able to act as community champions in a very effective way.

## 7 The Role of Elected Members

Elected Members should be seen as a point of reference and “first port of call” for their Ward constituents and indeed for residents in general who are interested in participating in engagement.

It is essential their role as community advocate and arbiter is supported by effective communication within the local authority. The support of Elected Members can move things along and they ultimately can be asked to decide in the Council Chamber between competing claims for resources.

The engagement process must have a primary purpose of ensuring they are familiar with the important community conversations which are happening.

While they are kept informed through formal council mechanisms it is often the informal networks which provide much more awareness regarding the significance of issues on the street.

Where required Elected Members should be invited to all engagement events in their ward and a representative group should be invited and present at boroughwide events. It should also be noted that some groups might wish to meet without Members present to enable a more frank discussion to take place.

As a matter of routine, circulation of update e-mails and formal briefings should be sent to Members regarding community engagement matters.

While local democratic governance is a formal process it is important that the engagement activity which is occurring is seen to reinforce this, albeit in a less formal manner. It should complement the process rather than become an alternative mechanism at odds with it.

Local member commitment in time and effort must not be undermined in this way.

## 8 Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

Monitoring and evaluation are very important to include at the planning stages of an initiative. Monitoring is statistical and measurable information and evaluation is the analysis of this information.

### Evaluation can:

- Gain information that will help you make practical decisions about your programme.
- Identify the strengths of your programme that can be built on.
- Identify any weaknesses and potential problems before they develop any further.
- Help you identify changes to your objectives or any parts of your programme that may need improving.
- Give a clearer sense of direction to the programme by providing information about what has happened and why.

### The list below shows some key steps in evaluation:

- What are the goals and objectives of your programme and the evaluation?
- What is the time frame and specific dates for collecting and reporting on the information?
- What kind of information do you want to collect?
- Who will collect and analyse the information?
- How will this information be collected? For example verbal or written records, case studies, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups.
- How will ethical issues be dealt with? For example, gaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality.
- How will you report the evaluation findings?
- Who you will report the evaluation findings to?
- How will the evaluation findings will be used?
- How will you involve / empower communities in analysing information and subsequent action?

There are a number of issues that are particularly pertinent to Ellesmere Port in respect of community engagement.

### Start small

A sense of what is practical and right for the group of people you are aiming to reach and involve is fundamental. Do not try to put too many activities or too much information on people's plates at the start.

Build up engagement in short manageable steps which should encourage rather than demoralize participants. Small improvements in outcome will lead to conversations regarding "what works" and "next steps".

### Personal contact is important

A range of methods to engage and communicate will generally achieve better results as not everyone is comfortable with every method or technique. Some people do not like public events but are comfortable with a survey or email. Alternatively a public event can sometimes be dominated by a minority and an unrepresentative impression given of the wider community opinion.

However it is important to try to personalize the process, get to know some participants, acknowledge the time and effort they have made. People are usually very honest and forthright where they have established a personal connection with someone and will provide sometimes raw but very genuine comment and opinion. The amount of trust and empathy which is built up will also act as a stimulus to greater involvement as individuals talk to their family, friends and work colleagues.

The contributions made both collectively and by significant individual effort should be highlighted at events and meetings. Positive feedback as we are all aware is appreciated and a great motivator.

### Reward contributions

A number of methods of rewarding individual or group involvement in engagement exist to stimulate wider participation. This has been successfully used in Ellesmere Port, as a way of encouraging residents to become more involved.

In terms of incentives there are legal issues and direct payment is subject to tax and benefit regulation.

### Working with Faith Groups and the Voluntary Sector

Ellesmere Port has a strong Voluntary and Faith sector, with a strong representation from Christian faith groups. The voluntary and faith sector is able to respond flexibly to rapidly changing local community needs, while the role of volunteers is also critical in ensuring that communities are resilient and self-sustaining.

Faith Sector activities support residents in many different ways, including events and programmes for young people, schemes centering on adult health and well-being, dance clubs and through hiring rooms and halls. They are an essential part of the fabric of community life in Ellesmere Port.

Other voluntary groups also exist and most come under the umbrella of the Ellesmere Port and Neston Association of Voluntary and Community organizations (EPNAVCO), which was set up with the support of the statutory sector. It aims to support a network of 200 member organizations by March 2011. Over the last five years it has gradually won over a range of partners, set up a volunteer centre which in the current year will help over 1000 people into volunteering.

It is a key partner for the Authority which can mobilize participants, encourage new initiatives and help to develop volunteering and community champion work across a range of diverse communities.

EPNAVCO's most recent report indicated it placed over 50 volunteers into roles after having been unemployed for more than 6 months. In addition the Faith Sector estimates that over 31,000 voluntary hours are provided by the sector, supporting forty-plus activities.

Volunteer numbers were up by 25% in 2010 / 2011 and the volunteer centre is successful.

While structural changes to the funding of the voluntary sector and the wider partnerships will happen in 2011 this sector can become an even more significant partner for engagement activity that is being planned in the future.

For its part the voluntary and faith sector needs the support and understanding of the public sector to help it thrive and carry out its essential role effectively and with creativity. A strong partnership between public sector organisations and the sector, based on mutual understanding and trust, is therefore essential to the well being of Ellesmere Port.

## 10.1 Training Residents

Investment in training and support is crucial to the success of long term engagement and consultation activity. This training can be either internal or external courses and events. It may be possible to combine with the training of staff, and if this is the case helps to break down barriers.

Some training organizations still receive grants – from either central or local government – and these avenues should be pursued.

It is important that the skills training and numbers supported correlate closely with the principal methods of engagement the council is adopting the coordination and central responsibility for resident training should be with a senior manager to ensure success and wider corporate commitment.

This is and should be an area of close scrutiny in terms of equalities and impact assessment.

## 10.2 Residents Panels

### 10.2.1 PLANNING

- Identify the role and remit of the group you want to set up.
- Plan your recruitment carefully. How often will they meet? Where? What costs will be involved? What will their remit be?
- Plan the running procedure.
- Plan how the Panel may be concluded, or refreshed and over what timescale.
- Ensure a Panel is representative of the target population. People who leave the Panel must be replaced and at the same time it must remain representative. This requires careful management and renewal as required.

- Replace Panel members before they become too conditioned with the issues, as this reduces their ability to represent public opinion.

### 10.2.2 ADMINISTRATION

Keep a clear line of dialogue open so members can contact you with any concerns or questions.

Send out information about meetings with plenty of time and always remember any accessibility or language factors.

## 10.3 Surveys

Surveys can be an effective way to gather information. They can provide information about how people feel about issues using a series of structured questions.

### Surveys can be carried out either:

- Where a person completes a questionnaire received by post or other means, or
- Where an interviewer asks the questions and records the answers.

### 10.3.1 WHEN TO USE A SURVEY

Surveys are designed to collect views where those questioned have been randomly selected. The statistical results can then be generalised to a whole population.

If surveys are used to conduct small-scale studies, the results can provide useful information but may not be representative of a total population.

### 10.3.2 CARRYING OUT A SURVEY

Careful planning and timetabling is essential to carrying out a successful survey. This is in three stages:

#### 1. Design and preparation

You must be clear about what you want to ask; who you want to ask; what you need to know; what you will do with the results.

Decide what type of survey you wish to conduct; identify your population of interest and how the sample will be collected.

**Design of questionnaire:** Most questions should be closed – asking people to tick a box.

A limited number of open-ended questions may be used to explore more complex issues. The look and layout of the questionnaire is very important to encourage responses.

If you are intending to analyse the data numerically, it will need to be in a format that can be numerically analysed. You will need to use closed-end questions if you wish to analyse the data statistically.

**Examples of ways to present closed ended questions include:**

- a. Yes / no questions (with check / tick boxes).
- b. Scales, for example: "How happy are you with the recycling service in you area?"

Not happy at all 1  2  3  4  5  Very happy

#### 2. Data collection

This is the fieldwork stage where the questionnaire is sent out or the interviewer contacts

**the selected sample. Response rates can be increased by:**

- A pre-survey letter being sent.
- Using a covering letter with the survey, explaining the purpose of the study, giving assurances of confidentiality and a contact name.
- Using reminder letters and follow up surveys.
- **Good timing:** If possible surveys should arrive at the weekend. School holidays, especially summer and Christmas should be avoided.

#### 3. Analysis and presentation of the results

Analysing survey data is a skilled and time-consuming task. It is vital that the information is accurately represented and gives a balanced picture of results.

## 10.4 Face to Face Interviews

Face-to-face interviews have been highlighted as the preferred method for contact and engagement, and it is recognized by the public that such interviews obtain information directly in a way that is clear and unambiguous, especially if appropriate training for interviewees has been provided.

While not everyone can eloquently express himself or herself if questions and interviews are framed correctly it is possible to get an opinion, comment and / or judgment from almost everyone, no matter what their personal or social characteristics maybe.

There is a real skill in maximizing feedback in conducting an interview without pressurizing individuals or causing them to feel uncomfortable or make them "clam up". Face to face interviews are an opportunity to promote the positive aspects of the engagement process.

People will relate their experience to others with the thought or comment that "at least they were asked". Door knocking or interviews arranged outside the home are labor- and resource- intensive. It presents a clear opportunity to utilize the volunteering approach or resource across the borough.

## 10.5 Focus Groups

These are discussion groups that tend to involve 10-20 people, usually led by a trained facilitator. It typically aims to bring together the attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and experiences of different people on a subject.

Focus groups can be successfully used for in depth consultation regarding issues such as strategic plans, positioning policies, service specific planning, or a new development in a local area they could also form part of consultation strategy for community-building activities. They usually last for three to four hours, but can be much shorter.

Well-developed facilitation skills are very important for focus groups as they rely on the expression of views and opinions.

The facilitator must ensure that everyone has opportunities to put their view across and that people don't dominate others.

This can be challenging when the topic is one that the people attending are passionate about.

### 10.5.1 PLANNING

- Identify how you will select participants. Do you want a random group, particular services users or people of an interest group? This can take time but you can use existing networks and structures to make contact.
- Give plenty of time to notify people and for them to decide. Writing to them and following up with a phone call can help.
- Clearly identify what will involve being on the focus group.
- If you are not facilitating, contact facilitators. Be clear on what you want to achieve from the day. Meet with the facilitator at least once before the event.

- Prepare in advance what you want the focus group to achieve.
- How will you write up the results and what will you do with them, make sure information gets fed back to participants.
- How will you inform people on what is happening after the focus group?
- What will your timescale be?
- Where will the focus group be held?
- Allocate plenty of time to develop an agenda, script, prepare materials, invite participants and agree the date.

### 10.5.2 ON THE DAY

- Introduce participants.
- Outline the process and timings and determine any ground rules for the conduct of the focus group.
- Depending on the level of information provided, an overview of the topic should occur.
- A set of questions or issues will then be discussed by the group in some detail.
- A simple evaluation sheet provided to all participants is a good way of finding out how the process was viewed.
- Focus groups conclude after issues have been thoroughly discussed or time is up.

## 11.1 Adverts and Posters

Posters are a good way of getting a large number of people interested in what you are doing.

A well-designed poster is eye catching, provides just the right information in an easy to understand way and can be put in a range of locations. As a rule, always ask yourself who you are trying to reach. What message are you sending to what audience? What are your objectives? Remember this with all communications. It is helpful to get a professional to design one, but if you can't do this, then the points below will help.

### Title

Keep it short and to the point - titles should make a bold statement and draw the reader in.

### Text

Keep the text to a maximum of 100 words. Don't get drawn into writing narrative. Bullet points and short messages have more impact. Posters are usually only seen for a short time:

The more text on the poster the less likely it is to be read. **In your poster text remember to include:**

- Date and time of events.
- Where to get more information.
- Logos of the Council and / or organisations and partners.

Pictures, graphics and images should be kept to a minimum, be concise and have visual impact. Use of space and the layout are particularly important when producing posters. Too much on the page will lead to visual confusion and make the poster ineffective.

### Page layout

- Choose a clear and simple layout that is eye catching and easy to read.
- Try not to put more than five points on one poster.
- Use bullet points to add variety.
- Get a range of feedback on your drafts from different people and don't be afraid to edit.
- Use a minimum sized font of 18 point.

### The audience

- Who are you hoping will read the poster?
- Have you catered for their needs?
- Have you used translations to make the poster accessible?
- Use images that reflect your community (and make sure you have permission to use them).

### Distribution

It is necessary to have a distribution plan. This would be part of a communications plan.

Who is going to get it and how will it get there? Will it go by post (a cost consideration), or by hand? Can you enlist the help of existing groups or networks? Where will they go? How many will you produce? Good places to distribute posters to display include local businesses, shops, post offices, community centres, libraries and the local media sales.

Make sure you contact people who might help with distribution at a very early stage to fit your headlines with their schedules.

### Resources

Establish the budget that you will need and keep to it. How many copies will need to be produced? Does there need to be translation information? Can you design it on your own computer or will you have to go to a designer? All of these points raise financial considerations that need to be costed.

### Additional – local designers, inhouse style

Don't forget that there may be in-house designs and styles that you need to meet, especially if you work for the Council.

Have a look at other posters out on the streets, or in advertisements to get an idea of what you want to do. Don't be afraid to use your imagination.

## 11.2 Newsletters and Leaflets

Newsletters can be used to keep people informed, attract interest or recruit people for projects.

Newsletters are important for giving information about services or a project you are trying to set up. If you are creating a newsletter make sure you aren't duplicating an existing one. Newsletters can be very different in the way they look, the size and the language.

Newsletters should be planned carefully to ensure you are getting maximum impact.

### Decide:

- What message you want to get across.
- What your newsletter's tone, content and language will be.

### Planning

- Who is your audience?
- What are the aims and objectives of the newsletter?
- What will the content cover - what goes in or stays out?
- Will the tone be formal or informal?
- When does it need to be produced by?
- What will the format be?
- How will it be distributed?
- How much will it cost to design, print and distribute?

### Production

- Communicate clearly so that contributors know timescales and responsibilities. Who has to do what by when?
- Develop drafts of the newsletter at key stages, check for accuracy and clarity.
- Make sure everyone involved in development knows what is happening.
- How is the newsletter going to be distributed?
- Will it fit into leaflet racks or fit into an envelope?
- Is it going to lie flat on reception desks and coffee tables, or is it going to be distributed through letterboxes?

- Good places to distribute a newsletter include libraries, community centres, leisure centres, schools, clubs, businesses, post offices and shops.

### Photographs and captions

- You should include at least one graphic / photograph on each page. Pages of words make for a dull-looking newsletter. Include illustrations or photographs that complement the article and where possible have them include people. Make sure you have permission to use photographs of people.
- Make captions short, sharp and inviting. Captions have high readability and present a good opportunity to get a key message across.
- Quotes are a useful tool to add a sense of reality and inject life into an article. However, it is important to ensure that the quote used supports the point you are trying to make.
- Don't get obsessed with dates. They are often not relevant for the purposes of the newsletter. Often, the word recently will suffice.

### Key points

- Choose a bright and attractive heading.
- Date the newsletter.
- Use strong headlines with dynamic words.
- Keep sentence length to around 25 words or fewer. Use two or three sentences each paragraph.
- Vary the story lengths. Aim for a maximum of 300 word / item.

### Costs and timescales

These can vary greatly depending on the newsletter you produce and the design that you choose. Costs depend on design time, quality of paper, number of copies produced, distribution and photographers or writers if used.

Always give yourself time to talk to people with experience in producing newsletters. Draw up a production schedule and allow yourself plenty of time for slippage, late advice or last minute changes.

## 11.3 Electronic Communications

As technology improves the use of e-communication is increasingly significant both in accessing more and more households but in delivering greater value for money for cash limited organisations.

While some council premises will act as electronic hubs it is still vital that the communication strategies do not rely on this as a focus for those unable to access broadband and digital communication.

Online consultations make it very easy to ask a group of people their opinion on an issue. An unlimited number of people can be asked about an issue, download information online and respond via e-mail or comment on a website.

### On line consultations can take different forms:

- Details of a proposal or consultation document on line with an e-mail address to which replies can be sent
- Online survey or other structured feedback form for completion by users.
- Online surveys can be hidden from casual internet users and targeted to discreet groups

### Other things to consider:

- Online consultations can enable people in different geographical locations to take part so at the very least it's worth establishing that Individuals live, work or socialize in Ellesmere Port
- Where possible set up an on line survey using a software package that includes an analysis tool. This allows large volumes of feedback to be collected, collated and analysed quickly.
- Ensure that because the consultation is online it does not prevent participation. Allow alternative methods in costing to reach those off line.

## 12 Involving

### 12.1 Public and Open Meetings

Events are valuable for gaining information, sharing and networking good practice or to build interest in your community engagement work.

The first thing to ask is what type of event you wish to run. It could be a consultation event, a fun event, or a way of sharing knowledge. You need to think about the numbers of people to involve, for example an event with 100 people, or a smaller community consultation day.

#### To have a successful event:

- Plan well in advance, up to four months for a large event.
- Be clear what you want out of the event.
- Book venues early and contact people who have a role to play early, such as speakers.
- Plan out what you need to do and by when, allocating responsibilities if possible.
- Focus on how you will market your event, such as press releases, media partners, flyers, posters and appropriate publications.
- Make sure your event is accessible to everyone.
- Make sure there are emergency plans in case there needs to be an evacuation.
- Have a programme of what's happening where and when.
- Plan the evaluation right from the start.
- Plan your budget, and know everything that you are spending money on.
- If it is a community event, actively empower the community in planning and delivery to create ownership.

## 12.1.1 PLANNING

The following points can be applied to all events. There may be some that are not relevant to your event, for example a small consultation event in a hall may not need traffic management planning, but working through them and making sure you have addressed them if need be, makes sure all bases are covered.

- Identify what type of event you are doing and why.
- Who will be responsible for doing what at the event?
- Who will attend to help on the day?
- How long will it be?
- Is the location accessible? If, for example it is in a building, does that building have hearing loops, wheelchair accessibility and accessible toilets?
- How will you advertise your event?
- What scale will it be? For example, is it a large event in a park where hundreds of people may come, or a large conference with delegates, or a smaller community based event?
- Do you need event managers on the day?
- Do you have a health and safety plan?
- Do you need to do risk assessment?
- Do you have a plan of your location and what is going on where?
- Do you need public and employee liability insurance?
- Do you need to have police checks carried out?
- Have you provided crèche facilities?
- Do you need to provide food and if so, have you planned for dietary requirements?
- Do you need to consider traffic management, entrance gates, toilet facilities, marquees, fire equipment and food?
- Do you know emergency contacts and first aid considerations?

- Do you need a public address system?
- Do you need to communicate with members of the event team through radio?
- Do you need to consider lighting, technical support for presentations?
- Do you need to employ and brief facilitators to support discussion?

## 12.1.2 DELIVERY

Ensure people setting up are adhering to the agreed plan.

Do health and safety checks.

Make sure the event starts and finishes on time.

Manage people, movement from place to place, local people could work as volunteers with professional marshals.

Make sure there's no anti-social behaviour if it's an outside event.

Have a jacket, jersey, and umbrella supply if it's outside.

## 12.2 WORKSHOPS

These focus on involving key players in an area to generate a vision and strategy as part of a long-term initiative to bring about change. Those key players can be anyone from communities, business, councillors or service providers.

It could focus on a specific topic, or more general strategic vision / concepts. The process brings people together to discuss local issues of concern and brainstorm ideas for action.

Workshops can be as short as half a day, or be spread over weeks.

They are different from focus groups which tend to involve service users. The workshops help to build relationships with different groups. Each workshop can have a mixture of participants and address a theme or several parts of an overall strategy.

Participants, who are briefed in advance, are seated in a room with seven to ten people. Round tables are helpful to avoid hierarchies.

### 12.2.1 PLANNING

- Identify who will be involved and how they will be invited.
- Plan your briefing process. Identify how you will explain what is happening and why it is happening that way.
- Book rooms and spaces early. Consider access, space, refreshments, and central location.

### 12.2.2 CARRYING IT OUT

- Specialist presentations are necessary, up to one hour maximum to include any technical information needed.
- Round table discussion. Brainstorming. Writing down ideas on flipcharts and other techniques
- Report back, from groups and discuss ideas and solutions.
- Feedback results to participants.

## 12.3 Participatory Appraisal

Participatory appraisal is a community-based approach to consultation. It prioritises the views and attitudes of local people as experts in their own neighbourhood.

The developing approach and 'model' is designed to enable local people to identify solutions to issues facing the community.

It provides a mechanism for them to establish positive relationships with key service providers. It allows them to remain actively involved in the planning, delivery and monitoring of these solutions.

Participatory appraisal moves away from the problem frame - how bad it is for the community - to the solution frame - how the community would like it to be.

This approach produces more motivation and desire for change. This technique has been used successfully in the authority recently on the Stanney estate.

### Planning

Participatory appraisal uses visual and flexible tools such as maps, spider diagrams and charts. The process is interactive which enables people from all backgrounds and abilities to get involved.

Groups of residents are recruited trained and supported to undertake a community appraisal and develop neighbourhood plans.

### Carrying it out

The process has a number of phases;

- Preparation, recruitment to the participatory appraisal team- can be a mix of residents and some patch--based officers.
- Training on tools and techniques used.
- Street work, on location, likes and dislikes and what they would change.
- Clustering, sorting the information collected into themes.
- Training and street work planning
- Street work solutions collection
- Training and planning for stakeholder events
- Stakeholder events - telling all stakeholders about the findings
- Action planning meetings

The neighbourhood action planning, currently taking place in Ellesmere Port. is based on this work.

## 12.4 Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is an incisive and powerful facilitation tool. which can be used for all sizes of groups. The key feature of Appreciative Inquiry is its positive focus. It aims to harness existing good practice – ‘what works’- and in a series of interactive and dynamic group exercise allows people to develop outcomes and solutions

### Planning

The identification of a key theme, say around community involvement or service delivery, leads participants to look at positive practice and what is real to participants at present. This will not ignore past failures but encourages people to use their experience to facilitate new ideas, change and progress.

### Carrying it out

A series of exercises themed around the ‘4 D’s’ of Discovery, Dream, Design and Delivery allows participants to maximize potential solutions to the issue in hand.

The programme of exercises can be kept to a fairly short timescale (under a day at a push)and produces action plan outcomes as a result of the Delivery element of the exercise.

The process is simple and enjoyable to undertake and works with all age groups and requires no technical or specialist skills from participants.

## 12.4 Appreciative Inquiry

**Planning for Real®** is a tried and tested method for large scale community consultation which has become well regarded, with a reputation for delivering positive benefits in terms of good quality information from communities to inform development and regeneration.

Given the potential scale of work around economic regeneration in Ellesmere Port and the need to involve some of the more deprived communities in the area it could lend itself to this activity in no small way.

“Organisations wishing to run Planning for Real® events, provide Planning for Real® training or to describe themselves as users of the process should first contact The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation to discuss using the technique to its full effect and to obtain permission for the use of the trademark”

This toolkit gives a summary of the process of Planning for Real®. We endorse the process as an excellent community consultation technique as long as it is carried out correctly and is followed up and supported after the event. It requires commitment from all parties, especially the council and Elected Representatives.

It must have political support especially to implement the actions that come from the process. If this is not there, do not do it. It should be used where agencies are transparent with information and where the decisions have not already been made.

Planning for Real is not just about three dimensional models. It’s a process that engages all sectors of the community initially using three dimensional models of a local area as a focus for people to put forward ideas and solutions to local issues. The information is then recorded. The community is invited back to the action planning stages where the information is prioritised based on the issues important to local people. The process is also educational because it highlights the feasibility of actions and timescales of ideas and solutions. The process should not be seen solely as a consultation tool but as a truly engaging community empowerment process.

A large three dimensional model of a neighbourhood is constructed, preferably by local people, using cardboard cut-outs for buildings pasted onto a base plan fixed to polystyrene or cardboard. The model is used at pre-advertised sessions held in various locations in the community. Participants place suggestion cards on the model indicating what they want to see happen and where. The cards are sorted and prioritised to establish an action plan that is followed up by working groups. Participants mill around the model, and make their views known by placing pre-written or self-completed suggestion cards onto it. Working in small groups, participants order the suggestions by placing cards onto a chart which is divided into three bands - Now, Soon, Later - on one axis and those who should be responsible for taking action on the other.

Meetings follow this up with communities to sort out and prioritise suggestions so that a profile or local action plan can be drawn up.

This process includes involvement in all the stages but can also be used to develop capacity in local communities. It can be applied to anything from a small patch of land through to new planning frameworks.

#### Resources available include:

- **Citizenship Pack** – A local citizenship study pack for secondary schools for Key Stage Three which embraces aspects of citizenship for young people.
- **Schools Pack** – The locality study teaching pack for primary schools for Key Stage Two.
- **Training Programme of Courses** – A free programme of 29 practical training courses ranging from Planning for Real® to Facilitation Skills.
- **Free Training and Charitable support for Community Groups** – A free training needs identification and training programme for community and voluntary groups within England.
- **Engaging Young People in Regeneration** – A new project using practical tools to look at ways of increasing the involvement of young people in the process of urban regeneration.

## 12.6 Developments Trusts

Development Trusts are a way for communities to undertake regeneration and development projects themselves.

They make it possible to achieve the long-term sustained effort that is needed to evolve their own plans and put them into action. They are a high level form of community engagement, and involve a long term strategic approach.

Development Trusts are independent bodies with management structures ensuring accountability to local people. They are not-for-profit bodies, often with charitable status, making it possible to attract resources from public, private and charitable sectors.

Stanlaw Abbey Development Trust in the area is a non-profit-making voluntary organisation. Its aims are to strike a balance between economic, social and environmental issues affecting

Ellesmere Port and ensure that it is a vibrant, successful and pleasant place to live, work and visit; both now and in the future.

From this base the Trust we aims to work with partners to promote the development of Ellesmere Port as a community focused.

An important part of community engagement is relationship building and empowering.

The keys to successful relationship building and empowering include communicating, listening, being flexible, open-minded and having a long-term commitment. Capacity building means confidence and skills development, so that people can be part of projects in the future.

Project based community engagement and capacity building is one approach to develop relationships with communities and interest groups, or those seen traditionally as harder to reach.

This includes children, young people and older people. Successful project based community engagement and capacity building requires long-term planning, resource support and commitment.

An example of project-based engagement and capacity building is in the case study below, but there are many other project examples.

For example, a project could be music based, where young people who are interested in music, develop songs about their local area and what they would like to see improved.

Along the way they learn group skills, communication skills and have a working relationship with you as project organiser. They then may feel confident to attend a formal meeting you may want their input to. Many projects are based around arts or older people and health.

In the long term, it is an important way to engage with all groups of people and as the project develops, it will be clear that children, for example, are not that difficult to engage with. It just needs different approaches and time to develop relationships.

All tools throughout this toolkit can be used to develop project-based engagement, especially the planning sections above.

## Planning

- Project based engagement and capacity building does take planning, both short-term and long-term:
- Identify what sort of project you want to do and why.
- Plan the scale of it, who it will be with, for example young people, or ethnic groups and where it will be.
- Identify how you will carry out monitoring and evaluation.
- Set out a communications plan – always communicate with clarity and be honest.
- Identify how you will contact people who could be involved.
- Be clear on the benefits for them to be involved. What are they going to get out of it? What will you get out of it? Why are you doing this?
- Identify the need for any assistance, for example will you need any skilled facilitators in particular areas for training and capacity building.
- Will your project be long term, or a one off initiative and how will this be communicated to participants?
- What budget will be needed and, especially if the project is long term, how will it be sustainable?

Once these first steps are done then specific planning will need to be carried out, bearing in mind what you want to achieve. **Always:**

- Have clear lines of communication.
- Remember accessibility, jargon free language and why the project was set up in the first place.
- Be flexible and listen to people involved in the project.

# The Our Place partnership



**Our Place Area Management Team**  
4 Civic Way, Ellesmere Port CH65 0BE