



NORWICH
City Council

Working better together

Norwich City Council's
community engagement strategy

MAY 2009

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Introduction

Norwich City Council wants to improve the way we work with communities in the city. There are already some good examples of how we work with people in Norwich: when we plan play areas, housing improvements and local transport projects. In the last few months we have been asking people how we can best do this and you said:

- all communities should be involved in the decisions that affect them
- all communities deserve high quality public services, shaped around their needs
- what the council does should take into account what local people think.

This document, **Working better together**, is a way of making sure that we have ways of finding out what you think and acting on it. It recognises the diversity of our communities, the importance of helping people to help themselves and the need to make sure that people and communities have the opportunity to join in at whatever level they wish to and influence the way we make decisions and run services.

Working better together recognises that there are sometimes barriers to us doing things together and that these need to be removed for real involvement to happen.

It is really important that:

- you are given a say about your local area and your voice is heard
- you are involved, if you would like to be, in decisions and issues in your local area
- you are given the support to build the good things and create new opportunities that help make your community safer and stronger.

Context

The city council already has a neighbourhood strategy which sets out the best way how we might deliver services in local neighbourhoods.

The government's white paper Communities in control: real people real power 2008 aims to:

- pass power into the hands of local communities
- generate vibrant local democracy and
- give real control over local decisions to a wider pool of active citizens.

Working better together will help us do this.



Where we would like to be

By **Working better together** we would like Norwich to be a world-class city in which to live, work, learn and visit and to enable Norwich to be recognised as a city of:

- economic growth and enterprise
- environmental excellence
- culture and creativity
- safe and strong communities
- health and well being
- learning and personal development.

In our corporate plan, the document that sets out what the council hopes to do in the next two years, we say that we believe our job is to help to make Norwich:

- a strong and prosperous city
- safe and healthy neighbourhoods
- with opportunities for all.

The plan says: “we will work together with local people to create neighbourhoods where people feel secure, where the streets are clean and well maintained, where there is good quality housing and local amenities and where there are active local communities.”



What do we mean by community?

Communities are groups of people with something in common. They can be:

- **communities of place** – people living in neighbourhoods
- **communities of identity** – people from black and ethnic minority groups, older people, younger people, people with disabilities, religious groups and gay and lesbian groups
- **communities of interest** – people involved in groups which might cut across other communities like council tenants, allotment holders, cyclists, model boat enthusiasts, runners, theatre goers – or people who come together to use or are shaped by services such as parks, roads, community buildings, transport.

People usually see themselves as belonging to one community of place but more than one community of interest or identity. This means that communities can be very diverse.

Consideration needs to be given to this when we approach different communities.

How we will work better together

Keeping you informed

About things that are happening and may be important to you including services and local events.

Examples of how we will do this

include: producing Citizen and Tenant Talk magazines, leaflets, letters exhibitions, displays, and through the council’s website.

Asking you what you think

We will consult with you to help us make decisions where there are a number of choices.

Examples of how we will do this include:

using surveys, running focus groups, citizens panels and exhibitions.

Deciding together

Ask you to become involved in helping to decide on things that the council or a partner agency is responsible for delivering.

Examples of how we will do this include: working with local tenants and residents groups like the Norwich Tenants Citywide Board and the Sheltered Housing Tenants Forum, organising special meetings and events for residents, sports groups and special interest groups.

Acting together

Bringing together community groups, partner agencies and the council to work together to make things better.

Examples of how we will do this include: working with groups such as safer neighbourhood action panels (SNAPs), the City of Norwich PARTNERSHIP and the third sector forum.

Supporting independent community initiatives

Helping you to set up independent community groups to focus on things that are important to you.

Examples of how we will do this include: helping local groups to set up to run things like community centres, community gardens, road safety groups/campaigns, local resident associations, local tenant and resident associations.



What do we hope this new way of working will do?

Working better together aims to support strong, active and inclusive communities, who are informed and involved in decision making and help us to improve public services to improve quality of life for people in Norwich.

- Building strong communities, who can form and support their own organisations.
- Bringing people together to deal with their common concerns.
- Helping people to build the skills they need to improve quality of life in their own communities.
- Involving all sections of the community in decision making.

Who is Working better together for?

We recognise that the council alone cannot achieve the ambitions in this strategy.

Everyone has a part to play in making this work, particularly:

- all Norwich residents
- your local councillor, who will play a key role in delivering the aims in this strategy
- council staff – everyone is involved in community engagement activity in various ways
- community, voluntary and faith organisations, who provide local services, work directly with local groups and organisations and with members of excluded groups
- partners – by working with other organisations and partnerships to make sure that services across the city complement each other. Through the City of Norwich PARTNERSHIP and other partnerships, we will work with organisations, such as the police,

universities, health service, groups and individuals from the community, voluntary and private sectors to make sure that engagement activities influence the future direction of the city.

We also know that we need to work closely with communities to encourage more community involvement and ensure that what we do is flexible and can be tailored to different groups and individuals in different areas of the city. We understand that sometimes people are reluctant to get involved and we are working with other partners to make sure that joining in is as straightforward as possible.

Working better together – themes

This year we will focus on the following themes which will be reviewed annually:

Theme 1

Understanding our communities – understanding what is happening in each neighbourhood and working together with local people to make sure services are delivered which people want (neighbourhood plans).

Theme 2

Putting people at the heart of what we do – improving the way we work which puts people at the heart of the service.

Theme 3

Equality and diversity – making sure that those communities who do not have a voice are supported to be involved in the best possible way.

Theme 4

Tenant involvement – supporting and developing tenant involvement in the council's housing service.

Theme 5

Community centres – supporting and developing locally managed community centres and facilities.

Theme 6

Promoting involvement – including supporting new ways to be involved and have a voice.

Theme 7

Supporting communities to do it for themselves – including providing information, advice, guidance and sign posting.

Our promise to you

We will:

- be clear about our purpose
- involve the community as soon as we can
- give people the chance to get involved in the way that suits them best
- be inclusive
- be clear about responsibilities
- be clear about what support/resources we can give
- be clear about the level of involvement
- be honest about limitations
- be clear, co-ordinated and consistent with our consultations
- learn from our experiences
- share feedback
- be flexible
- work and celebrate together.



How will we know when we have got there?

We will have been successful in implementing '**Working better together**' when we can show:

- more community activity in neighbourhoods
- more people and organisations who feel they can influence the shape of local services
- more people and organisations who feel they can influence decisions
- improved services as a result of community involvement
- our national measures of performance are improving, in particular:
 - the percentage of adults who feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area (NI 4)
 - the percentage of adults who feel their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds can get on well together (NI 1)
 - the percentage of adults who feel a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood (NI 2).

The improved ways of working resulting from this document will be assessed as part of the new comprehensive area assessment – a way in which council's performance will be assessed for the foreseeable future.

The Audit Commission, the council's watchdog, will test the 'duty to involve' by looking at the following:

- Councils' and partners' engagement with their communities and understanding needs of the vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- The extent of involvement of communities in defining priority outcomes and assessing whether outcomes have been achieved.
- The effectiveness of local partners activities in co-ordinating community engagement and communicating its impact on their decisions.

Working better together to make a difference

Everyone in the council will be working together to make sure that we put people at the heart of all our services. There are already some good examples of where we do this now but we know we need to improve.

We also understand that it's not always easy for someone in the community to come to talk to us, never mind get involved. That's why we have a team of staff who will work closely with communities to support and set up groups and help with ways to get people involved. More information about the team and how they can be contacted are at the back of this document.

Here are a few examples of how local people are making a real difference to their community.

Grapes Hill Community Garden

Passionate about their environment and with limited access to open spaces, a group of local residents approached the council, looking for support with a project to improve their area.

They formed a group to establish a community garden on a derelict site in the heart of their neighbourhood.

Working closely with us, they influenced our decision on the use of the land. As a result, we agreed to lease it to them for a peppercorn rent of just £1.

The residents' group had two successful applications for start-up funds to develop and progress their idea. Those involved in the community garden feel they've been given the chance to control and shape their local environment, helping them to build a stronger relationship with the council.

Heartsease schoolchildren put brakes on speeding motorists

A group of concerned local residents approached the council, keen to do something to reduce traffic speed within their estate.

Together, we developed a way to tackle the issue which involved residents developing a community-based project. This resulted in children designing signs urging drivers to kill their speed and launching an effective publicity campaign to spread the message.

Belvedere Community Association

When the Belvedere Community Centre lost several key members of its management committee and were facing the prospect of whether it could continue to run the centre, a plea went out for local people to help. As a result, passionate residents combined forces to form a new committee to run the centre. Now six months later, the result of their efforts shows a huge impact on the local

community. With support from the council's community engagement team, Belvedere is a successfully managed, vibrant centre, facilitating a wide range of activities from parent and toddler sessions, dance classes and support groups for refugees to a community lunch club and fun family events.

The volunteers behind all this activity state how they have gained a massive sense of achievement in giving something back and providing a service to the community. Several volunteers talk with pride about the reward they feel helping others whilst also gaining new skills and confidence through the experience. Supporting the group behind the scenes is the community engagement team; the Vice Chair described the team as "their brick wall of support, when we fall, the team rebound us back in the right direction, and off we go again."

The council owns 16 community centres across the city all managed and run by local volunteers such as the Belvedere Community Association.



20mph consultation

Last year the transportation team undertook a consultation with 3000 residents in three areas of the city about introducing signed only 20mph speed limits in their residential areas. The areas affected were Borrowdale Drive, Marlpit Lane area and Vauxhall Street area. Each household was sent a six page leaflet informing them of the proposals and every child who attended a school within the area was given a leaflet to take home. A tear-off Freepost reply form was included in the leaflet, but residents were also encouraged to complete the form online. To assist the consultation a dedicated website was set up www.norwich.gov.uk/20mph, along with a dedicated inbox for questions, 20mph@norwich.gov.uk. A pilot scheme has been set up and will be monitored and reported back on.

St Stephen's Gate Tenant Residents Association

Chair Vic Clapham

Vic moved into the area from Eaton about three years ago and had some concerns about the area. He contacted a local councillor who put him in touch with Norwich City Council. Together they organised a meeting at St Alban's church hall and the St Stephens Gate TRA was established about two years ago.

"We got lots of help and legal advice from the council, to adapt a model constitution to meet our needs."

"The councillors have been very, very good and meet with us regularly. They helped immensely in getting things done."

Local people have recognised the benefit of the actions of the residents association. They have made significant improvements to the well-being of the area. Also having a tenants and residents association has been a way of getting people talking and working together. They talk about the improvements to the area and suggest ideas for further projects.

Several local people wanted a play area so with help from a local councillor they got a draft plan together for consultation and contacted a number of organisations for funding.

The project has been put on hold for the time being though as some people strongly argued against having play areas for fear they would spoil the area by attracting drunks and children with bad language.

The group has established a community garden, using funding from the city council participation fund. CityCare contributed a bench for the garden and Mow and Grow did some of the ground clearance work.

"Quite a lot of people speak to me about various issues. They feel having a TRA in the area helps get things done."

"We have refurbished a memorial bench and plan to repair some more in the area."

"An officer from environmental health has brought us two tins of paint so we can repaint the street furniture that has been graffitied."

"We have had some walkabouts with council officers to identify work that needs doing in the area. Some trees in people's gardens have been trimmed where they were obstructing the path and blocking light. Street signage has been improved to make it easier for people coming in to the area to find their way round, including emergency vehicles"

"In my role as chair of the TRA, I regularly report fly tipping to City Hall, which is actioned quickly."

"We have also organised events in the community including a barbeque, Christmas bazaar and Easter fair to raise funds and promote the group."



Vic Clapham Chair of St Stephen's Gate Tenant Residents Association

Hellesdon, Earlham, Larkman and Marlpit (HELM) Residents Association

HELM Residents' Association is a group of local residents who strongly believe that the local community should be involved in the things that affect their area. We want to have a say in what happens, be part of the decision-making process and are eager to contribute to local projects.

The association, set up in 2003, works closely with Norwich City Council, the police, the HELM Development Trust and other local agencies and believes that we should work together to make a difference

What a difference we have made:

As part of a two year Neighbourhood Management Pilot Scheme, we have been involved in a number of community projects.

A street leader network was set up, which encouraged residents to keep an eye on their area and use a local reporting system to identify things that needed doing, such as clearing fly-tipping or problems like

anti-social behaviour. This information was then logged, monitored and passed onto the most appropriate agency to deal with.

Another successful measure, introduced to reduce anti-social behaviour, was the funding and fitting of 35 alley gates to residents properties.

The HELM Residents Association plays a dual role, as it also acts as the Safer Neighbourhood Action Panel, working with the police and the council.

We hold quarterly public meetings, around the HELM area. At these meetings, local crime statistics are provided by the local Safer Neighbourhood Policing Team and the community are encouraged to raise crime related issues of concern to them. These are then prioritised and three are identified as problems to be tackled during the next three months.

These are some of your success stories and we know this is just the beginning. We need your ideas and help to make your community safer and stronger and somewhere you are proud to live.



Children from Catton Grove involved in a campaign to slow down traffic.

If you want to get involved who can you contact?

Want to find out what is happening in your neighbourhood?

Who can you contact if you want to get involved in your neighbourhood?

Contact the community engagement team

Putting people at the heart of our services is something everyone in the council will be working together on. To help do this there is a community engagement team whose primary role is working with communities, groups and individuals across the city to improve how they get involved with the council and each other. In addition the team will work closely with all service areas within the council, as well as external agencies, providing them with information, advice, and support to ensure that people are involved in, and are at the heart of, all the services delivered in a neighbourhood.

The team has eight community engagement officers who each look after a specific neighbourhood within the city.

Where is the team based?

The team is based in City Hall but also use a patch office within each of the neighbourhoods. However, for the majority of their time, the team is usually out in their neighbourhood, meeting people, finding out what's going on and working with established groups and communities, working with people on other ways to get involved, developing action plans with groups which will make a difference and encouraging people to work together.

Would you like to find out how you could get involved with a particular service area of the council?

Contact the community engagement team – they will endeavour to help or put you in direct contact with the right service area in the council.

If you are interested in finding out more you can contact the community engagement team on:

t: 01603 212377

f: 01603 212380

e: community@norwich.gov.uk

Minicom: 01603 212587 (Mon-Fri 6am-6pm)

Find out more on our website:

www.norwich.gov.uk



Back row, from left to right:
Community engagement officers:
Caritas Charles, Mile Cross,
Catton and Fiddlewood; Emma
Penfold, city centre west, and
Jeff Compton, Heartsease and
Thorpe Hamlet

Front row, from left right:
Nick Downes, Hellesdon,
Earlham, Larkman and Marlpit
(HELM); Louise Curtis,
Bowthorpe; Debra Harris,
community engagement
manager; Lydia Martin, city
centre east; Ermir Prendi,
University and Eaton, and
Rachel Gaskin, Lakenham
and Tuckswood.



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