



Allerdale
borough council

www.allerdale.gov.uk

Community Leadership and Engagement Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Report

March 2022

Introduction and background

At their meeting on 16 July 2021 Overview and Scrutiny Committee members were supportive of the establishment of a task and finish group to consider this review topic

This group was created to consider the different aspects of community leadership, including the role of councillors as community leaders, the role of officers in area / community engagement and the different approaches for engaging with localities and communities.

In line with an established approach to involve the wider membership in task and finish group work, all non-executive members were given the opportunity to join this group.

The Task and Finish Group membership consisted of:

Councillor Allan Daniels
Councillor Hilary Harrington
Councillor Michael Heaslip (Chair)
Councillor Elaine Lynch

Review scope

The review is intended to explore different aspects of community leadership including:

- The role of councillors as community leaders.
- how should councillors engage with their areas, what support do they need?
- how do or should councillors get involved in community organising?
- The role of officers in area/community engagement and engagement with councillors.
- Identification of best practice and approaches for engaging with localities and communities with regards to decision-making and design and delivery of services at a locality level
- Whether there are existing distinctive plans for our locality areas, how they are developed and funded (economic, social, environmental, etc).

The intention is that the review will identify recommendations that can either be implemented by Allerdale Borough Council in the short term or carried forward as principles for the new unitary authority to consider.

What is a community?

The term “community” is frequently used but rarely defined. The group agreed that *community* leadership and engagement must be something different to *citizen* or *resident* leadership or engagement or we would call it that. For these purposes, a definition was that *communities* were those places or localities where people lived and had shared experiences of public services and local facilities and where most non-work interactions took place. An operational definition would be their local town and its hinterland with which people generally identified.

The Statement of Community Involvement recently adopted by Allerdale Council is an example of the use of “community” where what is really meant is “public” or “stakeholder”. However, there is reference to “neighbourhood planning” which is, we would suggest, community involvement as defined.

The maps appended to this report show:

a) (*Appendix X*) the seven “community areas” of Allerdale. We believe that Carlisle and Copeland Councils also had such areas but we don’t know whether they remain.

b) (*Appendix Y*) the fourteen “locality areas” of Cumberland, as proposed by Cumbria County Council, showing their “key service centres” (main settlement); again we don’t know whether they are extant.

The Allerdale areas are aggregations of parishes, while the Cumbria areas are aggregations of wards. We prefer parishes as they represent real places, provide local democratic input, and rarely change, whereas wards are artificial constructs which can change at the stroke of a bureaucratic pen.

Community-focussed plans and services

We noted that much democratic representation, leadership, engagement and service delivery used to be structured around this understanding of community, often with a single “front door” access point, but many, though not all, have resiled from that under the pressure of budgets and the delusions of centralisation and (false) economies of scale. We need to re-assert the importance of those communities and the benefits of joining up services, engagement and representation in localities and communities. (*See Appendix 3*)

We noted the report by Locality (“Saving money by doing the right thing: Why ‘local by default’ must replace diseconomies of scale”: 2014) which suggests that the real savings to be made in the public services are not through scale but through scope; joining up services locally around the legitimate expectations of individuals and communities results in greater effectiveness, and when done efficiently, produces economies.

We recognise that the new Cumberland Council, recognising its geography, may see the need to *direct* some services at a high level on a dual North Cumberland / West

Cumberland basis. However, while we acknowledge some citizen identification with those broad areas, we are not convinced that there need be any representational or engagement structures interposed between Cumberland and Communities. Certainly any re-invention of the previous Districts would be a retrograde step. We need to move on.

Local Leadership listening and responding to residents

The group looked at what worked in terms of listening, engaging and decision making. The core of a strong democratic community being town and parish councils that listen and respond to the needs of residents in a street, hamlet, village or town.

The larger the unit of organisation, the more remote elected representatives and decision making becomes. It is therefore vital that community leaders are aware of the risks of a new larger council working in a two tier council structure and commit to bridge the gap and support town and parish councils to be an effective part of a joined up local government offer in Cumberland. (See Appendix 2). A reduction in the number of principal authority councillors in Cumberland to forty-six will inevitably result in reduced councillor engagement directly with citizens; Cumberland councillors working in a team with their parish councils and councillors can go some way to fill that gap if it is properly structured and supported.

This led to the agreement that it was really important for the new council to commit to listen and involve residents through regular surveys and listening exercises. To re establish a regular pattern of residents surveys every two years that could be benchmarked against national surveys on local government and inform community engagement. (see Appendix 1)

Engagement mechanisms and tools

The group considered different ways to structure engagement with residents. The first was a detailed look at the Place Standard Tool. This was created and hosted by Architecture and Design Scotland. It is a way of assessing places. Whether the place is well-established, undergoing change, or is still being planned, the tool can help you.

It offers an easy to complete web survey with a graphical output based on how you have entered the data. This could be completed by a workshop of participants, residents' group, individual, family, class etc. This resource is freely available at: <https://www.placestandard.scot/>

Architecture and Design Scotland have some case studies on their web site.

The following example is based on work done by council officers, testing the standard in the town of Irvine which has a population of just over 34,000 (2016 ONS)

<https://www.ads.org.uk/place-standard-irvine-testing-the-place-standard-tool-for-officers/>

The following example is from Arbroath, population 23,900 (2016, National Records Scotland)

<https://www.ads.org.uk/place-standard-arbroath-article-4/>

A number of informative videos have been made that enable you to see how the Place standard has been used.

<https://www.ads.org.uk/case-study-place-standard-uses-internationally/>

The example of Wigton where the Place Standard tool was used to help shape the 'Borderlands' investment plan in Wigton Town Centre. A second example from Wigton was discussed where a very simple survey was conducted about the local park and pond, this had a huge response and was distributed through local networks like schools and community groups.

Existing approach: an example

Allerdale Council adopted a Resilient Communities Strategy on 24 February 2021 in [Appendix A for Resilient Communities Strategy.pdf \(allerdale.gov.uk\)](#) it has a focus on four areas

- Engaging, involving, collaborating, and empowering
- Promoting healthy, active lifestyles
- Addressing community safety issues
- Addressing inequalities and hardship

The Council adopts the New Local Government Network (NLGN) model setting out five steps on an arc of citizen engagement: inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower

The strategy recognises that just 31% of residents felt they could influence decisions. 27% wanted to be more involved. 59% said that it depended on the issue. Examples are given on page 8.

The strategy sets out the important roles that officers and elected members have in this process.

This approach is mirrored in the Allerdale Communications Strategy. '**Section 3 - We'll listen to our communities and empower them to address their issues**' focus on defining where Allerdale currently is, highlights how the council currently engages and sets out some of the tools to assist staff in meaningful engagement.

However, we note that what's missing from the strategy is a definition of community, mechanisms which can bring that community and its elected representatives into

conversations about how it is led and served, and a recognition that the issues it focusses on are not the only ones that contribute to resilience.

Recommendations

The Task and Finish Group makes the following recommendations –

- R1 The Council and its successor authority should make use of standing local forums in community areas to bring town / parish councils, police, street scene, NHS / GP / Primary Care / Unitary Council etc. etc. together with members and representatives in the community leadership role to bring a renewed community focus and engagement to public services. The Council and its successor authority should ensure mechanisms and resources are in place to deliver the Resilient Communities Strategy and other strategies and plans which can impact on communities.
- R2 The Council should review how it engages with Town and Parish councils and ensure it has mechanisms to support and involve this tier of representation. Parish and Town Councils should be encouraged to work together in clusters. This would enable a consistent policy of devolution to be applied by the new Unitary Council. Services that might be suited to being delivered through joint working with Parish and Town Council clusters include street scene, enforcement, horticulture, parking etc
- R3 The Council and its successor authority should conduct regular resident surveys across the Council area and communities and ensure that these meet the standards set out by the Local Government Association to assist with benchmarking. This will help to inform decision making and ensure the Council is focused on the needs and views of a) the whole population and b) the local views of its communities

Appendix 1

Resident Satisfaction Surveys

Local Government Association

The LGA conducts a resident satisfaction poll, this is a triannual telephone survey of 1,000 British adults across Great Britain.

It has been carried out since September 2012 to measure: six key indicators of resident satisfaction (including satisfaction with how the council operates, trust in the council and the perceived value for money it offers), perceptions of community safety and satisfaction with specific council-run services. Reporting includes a roundup of the latest results at a national level, as well as any significant movements in satisfaction observed across the whole series. Polling typically takes place in February, June and October.

The most recent survey results can be found here: <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/research-and-data/research-publications/residents-satisfaction-surveys>

The Local Government Association has enabled individual, groups of councils or regions to conduct or commission surveys in a way that data can be benchmarked against the nationally gathered data.

Allerdale Council surveys

Allerdale Council has undertaken regular resident satisfaction surveys that cover the whole district and can be analysed by community area. The first of the most recent series was The Place Survey in 2008. This was then followed by surveys in 2012, 2014, 2016 and the most recent one in 2018. The reports for the 2014, 2016 and 2018 surveys can be found on the Councils consultation web site:

<https://www.allerdale.gov.uk/en/consultation/> The most recent report confirms that these surveys were drawn up taking into account the guidance issued by the Local Government Association and “As far as possible these matched the weighting protocols used for the Place Survey (2008), LG Inform guidance and subsequent surveys for tracking purposes to ensure comparability”.

In addition to the large scale whole borough surveys, the Council is required to undertake regular consultation on a wide range of policies, issues, proposals and decisions. These are detailed on the above consultation web site and recent examples include Budget consultation; Leisure facilities in Keswick; Workington Supplementary Planning Guidance; Housing allocations and Arts Council Creative People and Places.

Appendix 2

Councillors as community leaders

The process of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Cumbria has highlighted the role of Councillors as community leaders with the removal of a whole tier of councillors.

The government also recognises the importance of Councillors as community leaders and funds the Local Government Association to provide a range of training and resources to support politicians in their role as community leaders, facilitators and brokers.

The LGA have highlighted their available resources and training on one page

<https://www.local.gov.uk/Community-Leadership>

A core text from the LGA is **The Political Skills Framework** - a councillor's toolkit

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/read-revised-version-poli-243.pdf>

A series of workbooks are available from the LGA, specifically for councillors on the following topics:

- [Acting on climate change](#)
- [Being an effective ward councillor](#)
- [Bribery and fraud prevention](#)
- [Chairing skills](#)
- [Commissioning services](#)
- [Community leadership](#)
- [Councillor / officer relations](#)
- [Creating a 'fit for the future' organisation](#)
- [Effective opposition during COVID-19, reset and recovery](#)
- [Engaging young people](#)
- [Equality, diversity and inclusion](#)
- [Facilitation and conflict resolution](#)
- [Handling casework](#)
- [Handling complaints for service improvement](#)
- ['Health in All Policies' \(HiAP\) and COVID-19](#)
- [Influencing skills](#)
- [Local government finance](#)
- [Mentally healthier places](#)
- [Neighbourhood and community engagement](#)
- [Neighbourhood planning](#)
- [Planning](#)
- [Scrutiny](#)
- [Scrutiny of finance](#)
- [Stress management and personal resilience](#)

- [The local pathway to net zero](#)
- [The role of leaders and cabinet members during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [Supporting residents with complex issues](#)
- [Working with town and parish councils](#)

Appendix 3

Locally delivered services, plans, and engagement

We list some services, plans and engagement arrangements which are in place or were in place which are configured broadly on the pattern of serving community areas. This is not an exhaustive list, but it is meant to illustrate the scope and importance of such provision. What is interesting to note is how little most of this stuff features on the agenda of current governance structures – which demonstrates the extent of the deficit in community leadership capacity and capability which those structures engender. And maybe how much we have forgotten what we once knew.

Services: Secondary school catchments; Sure Start Centres; Adult Education; Childrens Local Delivery Platforms; Libraries; GP and Primary Care clusters; Fire & rescue; Neighbourhood Policing; Employment; Enterprise; Streetscene. Also Council Centres / Onestopshops / Local links as the single front door.

Plans: Local Development Framework Local Plans; Regeneration and Market Town Plans; Neighbourhood Development Plans; Community Plans (Parish Clusters); ABC Area Assessments;

Engagement: Neighbourhood Forums; Parish Clusters.