



Halton Strategic **PARTNERSHIP**

Community

Engagement

Strategy

Help **it** Happen **in** Halton

2011-2015

Foreword

We are committed to providing excellent services that are responsive to the needs of all of our residents and provide good value for money in these difficult times. This can only be achieved if we ensure that our residents have a genuine influence over the delivery of local services.

Engagement is about giving local people greater influence over decisions that affect them and their community. It is about developing and maintaining open and effective relationships between public agencies and the communities they serve. Engagement helps us to make better decisions. It is about giving people choice about how money and resources are used in their community. The purpose of the strategy is to set a standard of how we engage everybody in Halton and ensure that the views and needs of the individuals and communities of the borough are heard and understood.

I believe that community engagement empowers local citizens, develops their sense of place and contributes to local democracy. We need to provide an equal opportunity for everyone to participate, ensuring that all local people are valued and that they are actively listened to and empowered.

I am confident that this strategy will ensure that local people have an influence over their local area and that their active participation helps us make Halton a community we are proud of.



Councillor John Swain

Portfolio holder for Halton Borough Council for Children and Young People,
and Chair of the Partnership's Equalities, Engagement and Cohesion Group

1. **Introduction**

Halton Strategic Partnership is committed to improving community engagement and participation in Halton. We believe that our strength as a community lies in our people. The world we live in is changing and we face many difficult challenges. To face these challenges we need to act as a community. It is now more important than ever to ensure that every resident plays an active part in the community they live in. It is up to us to provide them with the opportunity to do so.

We believe that the people and communities of Halton should feel ownership over the places they live in. Part of this is having a proper say in what services are provided and how they are delivered. Halton Strategic Partnership is committed to improving how we work with communities and individuals. We want everyone in Halton to have their say in the development of the borough, their local area and the services that affect them.

Improvement in the quality of life enjoyed by local people can only come about if the community is involved in making it happen. Solutions to problems are often dependent on local knowledge. The experiences of local residents and service users can help inform future service development. We will continue to engage with local people and help them to get involved in decision-making. We will also keep our communities informed about what we are doing and will continue to develop new and innovative ways to be more accountable to communities through consultation and open and transparent decision-making processes.

We already have a Big Society in Halton. People care about each other and their neighbourhoods. People take pride in where they live. By creating a clear and accessible framework for the residents of Halton to play a key role in the future of the borough this strategy will help us to fully utilise this community spirit for the benefit of everyone. We will ensure that every individual can play an active role in their community. Through increased active engagement the people of Halton will work with the partnership to deliver services that are efficient, effective and delivered to those who need them.

2. Our vision

“Every individual in Halton has the opportunity to play an active role in their community and feels that they can influence the services that affect them locally.”

3. Background and Context

3.1. The Halton Partnership and the Partnership approach

The Halton Strategic Partnership Board (HSPB) works to ensure that actions delivered by a whole range of groups and organisations are properly 'joined up' and make a real difference to the lives of local people. The Halton Strategic Partnership's Sustainable Community Strategy provides an overarching framework within which different partnerships, organisations and groups can co-operate together, commit to common goals and work towards improving life for people in the borough.

The following organisations and agencies are members of the Halton Strategic Partnership and are committed to the delivery of this strategy:

- NHS Halton & St Helens;
- Halton Borough Council;
- Cheshire Constabulary;
- Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service;
- Halton Housing Partnership;
- Halton Sports Partnership;
- Riverside College Halton;
- Cheshire Police Authority;
- Halton and St Helen's Voluntary and Community Action;
- Jobcentre Plus;
- Faith Community;
- Greater Merseyside Connexions Service;
- Halton Association of Secondary Heads;
- Halton Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise.

3.2. The Specialist Strategic Partnerships (SSPs)

There are five thematic Specialist Strategic Partnerships (SSPs) that sit underneath and report to the Halton Strategic Partnership Board. These are well established, each leading on one of the agreed five key priority themes of the Halton Strategic Partnership. Each is a multi agency partnership made up of representatives of agencies and services that have a key role in delivering the aims and objectives of the Specialist Strategic Partnership.

Their work is informed by key data and intelligence, consultation with the public and the expertise of partners. Each Specialist Strategic Partnership has developed a detailed delivery plan outlining the key work streams for their partnership.

These priority themes and their respective aims are as follows:

- **A Healthy Halton**

To create a healthier community and work to promote well-being and a positive experience of life with good health, not simply an absence of disease, and offer opportunities for people to take responsibility for their health with the necessary support available.

- **Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

To create an economically prosperous borough that encourages investment, enterprise and business growth, and improves the opportunities for learning and development together with the skills and employment prospects of both residents and workforce so that they are able to feel included socially and financially.

- **A Safer Halton**

To ensure pleasant, safe and secure neighbourhood environments, with attractive, safe surroundings, good quality local amenities, and the ability of people to enjoy life where they live.

- **Children and Young People in Halton**

Halton's ambition is to build stronger, safer communities which are able to support the development and learning of children and young people so they grow up feeling safe, secure, happy and healthy, and are ready to be Halton's present and Halton's future.

- **Environment and Regeneration in Halton**

To transform the urban fabric and infrastructure, to develop exciting places and spaces and to create a vibrant and accessible borough that makes Halton a place where people are proud to live and see a promising future for themselves and their families.

We want our residents to have a say in how we achieve these objectives. We believe that it is services, not service providers that matter to people. We need to look at issues that affect our communities and our residents collectively to understand what needs to be done. Problem-solving strategies need to be multi-agency and issue led. This Community Engagement Strategy is based on that fundamental principle.

3.3. Why do we have a Community Engagement Strategy?

The partnership has committed to ensuring excellent and meaningful community engagement through its Sustainable Community Strategy:

“The Partnership is committed to an inclusive approach to community engagement through its strategy and network arrangements...”

...we will continue to engage with local people and help them to get involved in decision-making. We will also keep our communities informed about what we are doing and will continue to develop new and innovative ways to be more accountable to communities through consultation and open and transparent decision-making processes”¹

We need to have a Community Engagement Strategy to provide a framework through which we can ensure that the residents of Halton are able to make a meaningful contribution to the development of their local area and the services they use. We want every resident to play an active role in their community and feel that they can influence the services that affect them locally.

The last Place Survey (2008) gives us some indications of how involved a sample of our residents felt.

Measure	Halton	National
The Council provides value for money	38%	32%
Satisfied with how the Council runs things	48%	43%
Would like to be more involved in the decisions that affect their local area	31%	27%
Have been involved in decisions that affected the local area in the past three months	11%	13%
Feel that they can influence decisions in their local area	25%	27%
Feel that they have been treated with respect and consideration by their local public services in the past year	68%	70%

¹ Halton Borough Council, *Draft Sustainable Communities Strategy 2011-2026*,

We believe that every person in Halton should feel that they can influence decisions in their local area. This could be more involvement in local democracy. It could also mean increased involvement in the community – individuals taking responsibility and action for the physical environment and the people of their community. Currently three-quarters of residents we asked do not feel they can influence decisions in their local area. Only 11% said that they had done so in a three month period. We want everyone to feel that they can, and that is the purpose of this strategy.

3.4. Economic Benefits

The current economic climate has set us some serious challenges in engaging with our communities. We need to ensure, now more than ever, that engagement is as effective as possible. By working as a partnership to eradicate duplication, we will ensure that no resources are wasted and information is shared and used to its maximum potential. We will ensure that all of our services represent the best value for public money and that every penny spent has a tangible benefit for the community we serve.

3.5. Barriers to Progress

An Ipsos MORI report “Halton – Our Place, Our Future” in October 2009 identified a number of barriers to achieving a better future for Halton, along with ways to overcome these. Some of the issues identified were:

- Mistrust of officials and politicians;
- Lack of planning;
- Residents’ apathy and disengagement;
- Inconsistency of funding;

The report also recommended some methods by which we can overcome these barriers:

- Improve accountability to local residents;
- Consistency of opportunity for all, not just special groups;
- Improve communications from public services and identify the best methods to do so;
- Embrace a positive attitude to initiating change.

The consistent theme is that we need to engage more with our communities. The report also explicitly highlighted the need to “increase resident interaction with public services”².

² Ipsos Mori, *Halton: Our Place, Our Future*, p32

The report highlighted that there is a positive sense of community within Halton. Comments from the workshops included:

“...but what has kept me here in the area are the people, they’re absolutely fantastic...”

“...all the neighbours are friendly and like everyone gets on with each other. I love it here.”

“close community”... “good sense of community”... “friendly neighbours”... “nice neighbours”... “quiet neighbours”...

It is this spirit that this strategy aims to embrace and use to inform and improve the design and delivery of local services and strengthen our communities.

3.6. What is a Community?

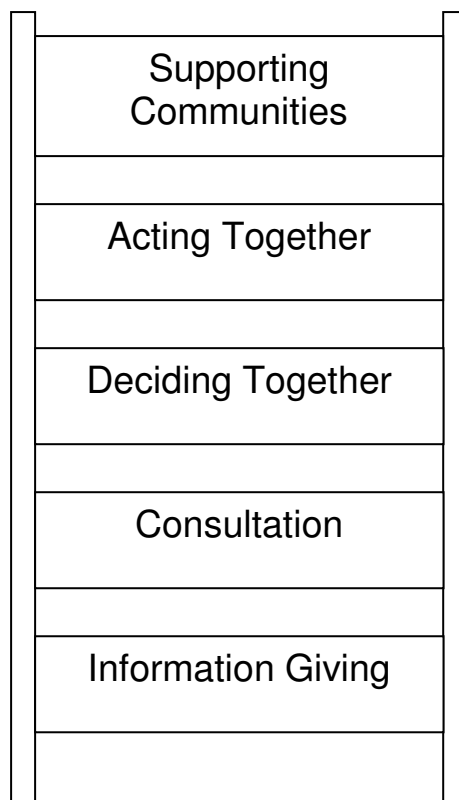
When identifying communities of people we need to engage it is important to understand what we mean by communities. A community is based upon a group of people having something in common. We have identified three different types of community that need to be considered:

- Communities of place: people who live in the same local area, for example people living in Windmill Hill, people living in Widnes etc;
- Communities of identity: people who have certain characteristics in common, for example people from a Black or Minority Ethnic background, young people, people with a disability, single mothers etc;
- Communities of interest – people with a shared interest for example cyclists, football fans, landlords, or people who use the same services, for example bus users, Council tenants, library users.

All three types of communities need to be considered and must have appropriate and equal access to engagement.

3.7. What do we mean by Community Engagement?

Community engagement simply means that the residents of the borough are actively involved in the decisions and actions that will shape its future. We have identified five broad types of community engagement. These five levels are shown by the ladder below.



This strategy and the partnership's self-assessment and monitoring arrangements are based on these definitions of engagement activity. Each engagement activity can be identified as one of the five levels on the ladder of community engagement:

1. **Information Giving** – Simple, direct one way communication. Either from authority to public or vice-versa. Keeping people informed of activities, decisions and events. This could be via a mail shot, information on a website, information via email, Facebook, twitter or text, or a stand at an exhibition.
2. **Consultation** - This involves a dialogue between parties who listen to each other. For example, options or proposals may be presented to the public who are given the chance to comment on them and ask questions about them. This could also take the form of the survey, delivered online, over the phone, face-to-face or through the post. There is no obligation to act at this level of engagement. Consultation means the right to be heard, not the right to influence or decide.
3. **Deciding Together** – The local community are involved in making decisions with the partner organisations on what will be done, with the agencies taking these forward. For example, involving local residents on planning new road layouts.

4. **Acting Together** – Decisions are made by partnerships between local people and agencies of the strategic partnership. The people involved in making the decisions also take part in carrying them out. This could include participation in events to shape and be involved in service planning and delivery.
5. **Supporting Communities**- When the partnership supports community services e.g. neighbourhood watch schemes.

4. **THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

The partnership operates its engagement activities within a defined but flexible framework. This framework is composed of six key strategic principles for community engagement which all engagement activity will be defined by:

- **Planning**: we will ensure all engagement activity is properly and effectively planned;
- **Working in partnership**: we will work with our partners to ensure all engagement activity takes a holistic view of services to ensure maximum impact for individuals and the communities they live in;
- **Breadth of engagement**: we will ensure engagement activity is broad and accessible, and will include equal access to engagement for “hard-to-reach groups”;
- **Depth of engagement**: we will ensure that the level and depth of all engagement activity is appropriate to the subject;
- **Taking action**: we will use the results of engagement activity to guide decision making and policy development – “you said, we did”;
- **Ongoing Communication**: we will keep all individuals informed of decisions and actions taken as a result of consultation and maintain open and continual communication with those involved. Where actions are not taken a clear rationale will be given.

4.1. Strategic principle 1: Planning

There are several steps to planning a successful engagement activity. Successful planning is the key to successful delivery. All activity will be carefully planned and the following criteria will be identified during the planning of each activity:

- **Identifying the need** – there should be a clearly identifiable need to undertake an engagement activity. This could be a statutory requirement to engage, an identifiable knowledge gap or the development of a new initiative;
- **Identify previous or planned activity** – has any engagement activity on this subject been undertaken before? Is any already planned that you could join with? The Halton Borough Council Consultation Finder can help identify these. There is a danger of engagement fatigue – don’t ask people about the same thing twice;

- **Identify the people** – the right people in the right area need to be engaged. This could be particular groups, a whole community, a random sample of residents, or those whose voices have been rarely heard before. The principle of localism is key here – people in the local area need to be engaged on issues that affect their area. This could be at ward level or as low as street level depending on the issue. Identifying the right people will help us in developing and advertising the activity.
- **Identify the purpose** – we need to be clear about what we are trying to achieve. Are we trying to get people’s views, or ask them to participate in a project? We need to ensure that you are engaging people in something they can influence;
- **Identify the approach** – this could be information giving, consultation, deciding together or acting together. Once we have decided on this we can plan the specifics of our activity;
- **Identify a method of evaluation** – we need to consider how we will evaluate the success or otherwise of the activity;
- **Identify ongoing communication methods** – identifying how we will let people involved know what you have done since engagement i.e. how to give appropriate and timely feedback.

4.2. Strategic principle 2: Working in Partnership

The Halton Strategic Partnership is committed to working together to ensure that every member of the Halton community is given a voice and the chance to influence decisions that affect them. We are committed to ensuring that we gather the best possible local information from residents to ensure that we shape and deliver services appropriately, efficiently and where they are most needed. This means we have to work together in all of our engagement activities and share the planning, delivery and outcomes of consultation and engagement. This will ensure that engagement activities and services are issue-led, not agency led.

Through this strategy we will work more closely together in our engagement activities with the residents of Halton. This will ensure that the partnership can take a holistic view of local areas based on the evidence and feedback provided by the local community. This will allow the partnership to create and share area profiles which can be used to target specific services to where they are most needed. It will also mitigate the risk of “consultation fatigue” – people being asked the same questions more than once. Taking an integrated partnership approach will allow local services to ask questions once and use the evidence gathered to inform a multitude of services – “ask once, use many times”.

4.3. Strategic principle 3: Breadth of Engagement

This strategy links strongly with the Council’s Corporate Equality Plan and the Halton Partnership’s commitment to equality of opportunity. We will ensure that all residents, including those in “hard-to-reach” groups, have equal opportunity and access to engage with the partnership on any issues that

affect them. We will take steps to monitor and, if necessary, increase the involvement of hard to reach groups in our engagement activities.

4.4. Strategic principle 4: Depth of Engagement

Engagement activity can take many forms and serve many purposes. There is such a thing as “too much” engagement – or to put it another way, “engagement for the sake of engagement”. The planning framework (strategic principle 1) that forms part of this strategy is designed to ensure that all engagement activity is meaningful and serves a specific purpose. It will also ensure that the detail and resources that go in to an engagement activity are appropriate to the objectives set.

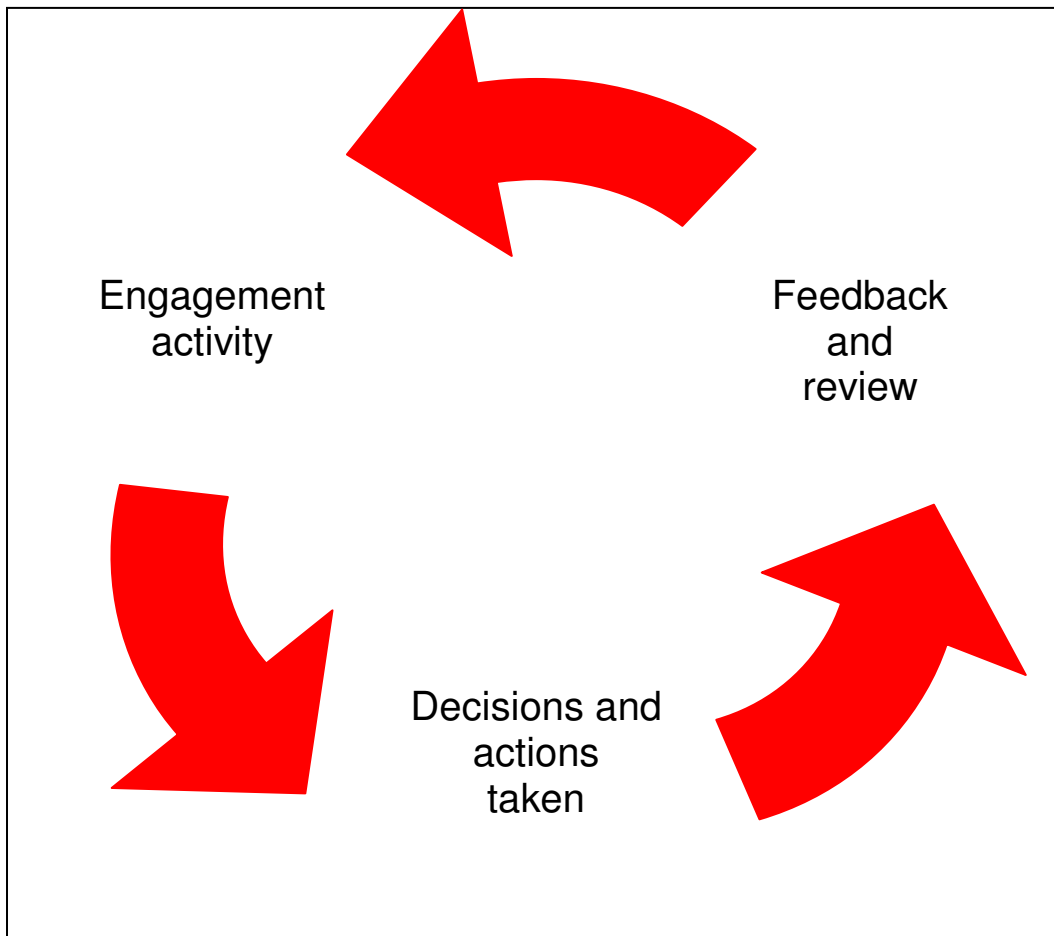
4.5. Strategic principle 5: Taking Action

All engagement activity needs to serve a purpose. It needs to secure positive outcomes for people and communities. In order to ensure this, the partnership needs to act on all engagement activity. This is not to say that all suggestions, ideas and input will be taken forward, but everything will be considered. Any actions taken as a result of engagement will be fed-back to all involved parties so that people can see the results of their involvement. If suggestions are not taken forward, the rationale behind that decision should also be fed-back. In achieving this we will end the perception that local service providers don't listen, or do listen but don't act, and replace this with a positive “you said, we did” reputation in the local community. This in turn should encourage more people to want to become involved, as they can see that by doing so they actually can make a difference to their lives and their communities.

4.6 Strategic principle 6: Ongoing Communication

We see community engagement as an ongoing process, as demonstrated below. We will keep all individuals informed of decisions and actions taken as a result of consultation and maintain open and continual communication with those involved. Engagement will not be a one-off exercise but will be the catalyst to ongoing two-way feedback on the progress of work and the impact it has on the community. Those involved will be told what actions have been taken as a result of their involvement. They will also be given honest reasons for things not being done.

4.7. The Cycle of Community Engagement



5. Bringing the Strategy Together

This diagram shows how the types of engagement, strategic principals and strategic objectives support the strategy and feed in to the vision for community engagement in Halton.



6. What has happened in Halton?

6.1. Summary of activities

Members of the Halton Partnership have been very active over the past few years in increasing engagement and participation of the public. There are seven area forums involving Councillors and members of the public which address local issues. A consultation finder has been developed by the Council to record details of engagement activities. The community development team have worked hard in developing links with community groups and representative of the communities we serve.

6.2. Case Studies

Case Study 1: Information Giving – Job Centre Plus

Jobcentre Plus in Halton has adopted the ‘Focussed Partnership Delivery’ practice that was recently undertaken in the Merseyside area. Jobcentre Plus in Halton conducted several information sessions (including 1-2-1 briefings, briefing paper and a group communications session all with key stakeholders). We have initially worked with approximately 120 Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) customers who have not worked for 2 years and over; the aim of this project is to identify and address the issues that these customers face in moving closer to the labour market.

The approach that Halton Jobcentre Plus proposed was to utilise our existing interview regime in a more coherent strategic approach, involving key delivery partners via case conferences and joint caseloading at set periods during the life of the project required to assist the customers to address the identified issues/barriers that they face when seeking employment.

Case Study 2a: Consultation – Halton Housing Trust

Neighbourhood Investment Framework (NIF) – Neighbourhood Investment Plans were developed at a local level in consultation with customers and residents across all estates managed by the Trust. The results were fed into the NIF which effectively determines the Trust’s next stage of development now that the Decent Homes Standard has been achieved.

Case Study 2b: Consultation – Cheshire Police Authority

Members of the Police Authority, local police officers, Community Support Officers and staff from Halton Community Safety Team went out and about on the streets to ask people about their priorities for policing and about policing services. The Roadshows took place at Runcorn Market, Halton Lea Shopping Centre and Halton Steam Fair and many people took time to respond to a survey and get crime prevention advice.

Members of the Authority and Senior Officers of the Constabulary and Council also held 'Face The People' meetings to have their say about public services and to hold the officers to account.

In 2010, the top 5 policing priorities for the people of Halton were:-

- 1. Responding to emergency calls**
- 2. Tackling violent crime**
- 3. Tackling domestic and child abuse**
- 4. Detecting crime and arresting offenders**
- 5. Tackling organised crime and terrorism**

The results of the consultation will be used by the Police Authority to inform the Chief Constable's objectives and set the police budget for 2011/12.

The consultation is carried out annually.

Case Study 3: Deciding Together – Halton Youth Service

The elected Youth Cabinet represent all young people from across Halton. One of their campaigns in 2010 was to make travelling around the borough easier and safer for their peers.

Youth Cabinet created an online questionnaire, consulted young people in a variety of youth settings and engaged young people in discussions during the Youth Service's Friday Night in the Park sessions to find out what transport barriers young people face. Over 100 young people participated in the consultation, highlighting issues with public transport, bus shelters and walkways.

The Cabinet have developed an action plan to tackle the issues; this includes meeting with HBC Transport Officers and bus companies to look at how bus journeys can be safe and a good experience for young people. Representatives of the Youth Cabinet and other young people are coming together to form a Transport Shadow group to support HBC transport strategy.

Case Study 4: Acting Together – Major Projects

Runcorn Town Centre Regeneration – In response to a community group seeking further intervention within one of Halton's Town Centres, the local MP and Halton Borough Council engaged in a formal dialogue with them. Additional stakeholders were brought in. Rather than the onus being placed on the Council to come up with ideas, the community group were also tasked with bringing ideas to the table. The Council are now supporting individual members of the group to deliver some of their ideas, such as reinstating the Runcorn Carnival. Alongside this, the Council are also acting on more strategic interventions in tandem with the local community.

6.3. Engagement audits

All partner agencies have made strides towards greater engagement. It is now time to bring this good practice together. The first stage of this was conducting an audit of partnership engagement activity to map our efforts to identify good practice, duplication and gaps in our activities. This audit was conducted in the autumn of 2010 and the results are summarised below:

In 2009 Halton Borough Council took stock of their current engagement activity. We knew that there was a lot of good practice already underway, and we wanted to get a detailed picture of everything we were doing. An audit questionnaire was circulated across the authority for departments to complete detailing their engagement activities and completing a self-assessment form.

This exercise highlighted a range of good engagement work that was already underway across the Council:

Information Giving	Consultation	Deciding Together	Acting Together
Leaflets	Surveys/questionnaires	Marketing Approach	Cultivate
Newsletters	Focus Groups	Area Forums	LSP & SSPs
Publication of Plans	Events	LSP & SSPs	Neighbourhood Employment Officer Initiative
Booklets	Road shows	Drop in sessions	The PCDL Partnership
Emails	Workshops	Consultation Review Panels	Working with Volunteers
Press Releases	Face to face meetings	Partnership Groups	Phoenix Park Subway Arts Project: Artists Selection Process
Newspaper Articles	Visits	Planning for real	Young voices volunteers project
Letter Drops	Presentations	Neighbourhood Management Boards	Halton Lea Library Steering Group
Surgeries	E consultations	Consultation groups of service users and providers	NMA Project Appraisal Process
Compliments and Comments Slips	Area Forum Presentations	Planning Live	Development of Years Ahead

Complaints Procedures	Mail shots	Steering groups	
SMS text	Drop-in events		
Radio broadcasts	Community projects		
Delivery of lessons and colleges			
Television Interviews			
Facebook			
Photographs			
Face to face promotion			

Areas across the Council were clearly running excellent activities and giving people the chance to influence the services that affect their lives. However, it was also felt that there were areas where a lack of clear co-ordination meant that there was potential for miscommunication, duplication and important messages being lost or unused. The accompanying report made several recommendations for further action:

- Corporately map engagement activity;
- Promote and increase utilisation of the consultation finder;
- Consider including involvement activity in service plans;
- Strive to better co-ordinate and streamline activity both internally and with partners;
- Consider how to strengthen and support the Councillor role in community engagement. Statutory guidance emphasises the Councillor role as advocates for the communities they serve. The Councillor role is crucial in order to advance community involvement in decision making, in accurately defining local needs and in helping to judge the impact of delivery.

Producing this strategy is the next step in ensuring that these recommendations are met. Additionally we have added the fifth step on the ladder of engagement – supporting local communities to recognise that we need to go further in our efforts to truly engage with the community.

This exercise was repeated, in amended form, across the strategic partnership in 2010. The results of these two exercises have given us a comprehensive and holistic view of the current state of engagement activity across the borough.

The partnership audit showed that there is a lot of excellent community engagement activity already underway in Halton. It was clear that what we needed to do was to:

- Join up our approach to community engagement;

- Investigate new and innovative ways to broaden community engagement.

7. **What will happen in Halton?**

Our aim now is to improve and expand our community engagement. This strategy is based on the achievement of five objectives.

- Objective 1: Citizen focused local decision making;
- Objective 2: Accessible and inclusive engagement;
- Objective 3: Open, efficient and effective engagement;
- Objective 4: Innovative engagement;
- Objective 5: Using and responding to citizen initiated engagement.

The following chapters outline how the Halton strategic partnership plans to ensure that we achieve these key objectives.

7.1. **Objective 1: Citizen-focused local decision making**

“We are committed to ensuring community and individual input in to the local decision making process. We will ensure that all decisions taken are focused on the needs of individuals and the local community, and that those affected are given meaningful opportunities to help make those decisions.”

7.1.1. **Councillor Involvement**

The role of local Councillors in community engagement is absolutely vital. Councillors are the key link between the partnership and the community. For community engagement to be effective it needs the support and active participation of residents, staff and local Councillors. This strategy will place Councillors at the heart of engagement activities, making them champions of community engagement. We will support Elected Members in their role in area forums and other engagement activities, ensuring that they can effectively champion local needs and priorities. We will ensure that Council and partnership staff are able to provide full and effective support for Councillors to become more actively engaged. We will support Elected Members’ involvement in finding ways of reaching out to “hard-to-reach” groups. We will create and maintain links between local Councillors and community groups. We will ensure that regular engagement with the local community is a fundamental part of the Councillor role.

7.1.2. **The story of place**

The partnership is committed to identifying and tackling issues at a local level. We recognise that different communities and localities within Halton have different issues. We are committed to ensuring that our engagement activities are targeted to address the key priorities for every area. This will contribute to building up a “story of place” to help us identify local issues and needs.

7.1.3. Service Evaluation – Mystery Shoppers

Residents' views on how we are performing and delivering services to the community are vital in shaping future decision making and service development. The partnership will consider the possibility of using local residents as "mystery shoppers" to evaluate specific services. This will achieve the benefit of allowing the partnership to target specific services for evaluation, and also allow us to see how our services cater for people with different characteristics. We will develop our links with community and representative groups to enable them to select individuals to participate in the scheme. We will develop a set of guidelines of how to plan and deliver a mystery shopper activity and how to target services appropriately.

7.1.4. Community Development and Capacity Building

The Council currently employs a number of community development officers who work across the borough supporting many forms of community engagement. The work of this team has been highly commended in the way it supports the communities we serve. These operational level employees need to be actively involved in the development of engagement activities to ensure that our engagement activities are focusing on the right issues and the right people.

Alongside the work the Council delivers, other partners deliver work on Capacity Building and Community Development. Halton and St Helens VCA the local support and development organisation, provides capacity building and development support to voluntary, community and faith groups across Halton. The Connectivity Team exists to support local groups to connect to other sectors, increase their voice and influence local decision-makers.

7.2. Objective 2: Accessible and inclusive engagement

“We are committed to ensuring that each and every citizen in Halton has equal opportunity to make their voice heard and influence decisions that affect them. We will ensure appropriate mechanisms are in place to ensure everybody’s access needs are identified and accounted for.”

7.2.1. Statutory Duties

The Council has a statutory duty to involve its residents in the delivery of its services. We are committed to ensuring that we engage with everybody in our community and we will ensure that no barriers exist based on:

- Age;
- Sexual orientation;
- Transgender status;
- Marital status;
- Caring responsibilities;
- Socio-economic circumstances;

- Gender;
- Pregnancy/maternity;
- Disability;
- Race;
- Religion and belief.

7.2.2. Hard to reach groups

We recognise that it is vitally important to ensure that when we engage, we engage everybody. Misrepresentative engagement practices will lead to unfair targeting of issues and policy development. The partnership will review and standardise all of its diversity monitoring practices in community engagement activities to ensure that they exceed the required standards and allow us to accurately review how successfully we are engaging local communities.

The partnership will monitor all participants in its engagement activities by all protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010. The data will be collated centrally, analysed on a regular basis and compared to the most up to date area profiling data to identify areas of the community that remain unengaged.

We will ensure that all staff across the partnership are aware of the need to recognise and remove barriers to engagement for hard to reach groups. We will ensure that staff are able to identify potential impacts of actions for all sections of the community. Co-ordinators of community engagement will have priority in having up to date training provided.

7.2.3. Community Groups

The partnership will use and share its existing links with local interest groups to ensure that we reach and engage with all sections of our community. We will work with representatives of these groups to ensure that the method of engagement does not exclude anyone on the grounds of the protected characteristics.

We will also utilise those members of the Partnership, such as Halton & St Helens VCA who have access to a membership that includes local voluntary and community groups.

7.2.4. Guidance

We will issue guidance on how to engage with hard-to-reach groups with the revised Community Engagement Toolkit.

7.2.5 Carers

We recognise the value that carers bring to our local community. We will endeavour to ensure that the needs of carers and those that they care for are fully involved in our engagement activities.

7.3. Objective 3: Open, efficient and effective engagement

“We are committed to ensuring that all of our engagement activities make a tangible and positive impact on the community and represent best value for money at all times”.

7.3.1 We are committed to ensuring that all of our activities will be of maximum benefit to the communities we serve. We will ensure that all engagement is accurately recorded and stored appropriately and is available for future use. Records of all previous engagement activity will be consulted when new activities are planned or proposed. We will adopt a principle of “ask once, use many times” to ensure that every activity and piece of information is used to its maximum value. We will not ask the same question to the same people over and over again.

7.3.2 Streamlining Strategies and Policies

In order to ensure a partnership approach we will streamline all community engagement statements and policies into one overarching Community Engagement approach. This strategy represents the first stage of this partnership approach. We will identify all strategies, policies and statements across the partnership that deal with community engagement and incorporate them in to the new framework.

7.3.3. Community Engagement Network and Champions

The partnership has previously operated a community engagement network of practitioners from every agency who meet regularly to discuss engagement opportunities. The partnership will re-establish this group to share recent experiences and best practice. In addition a new group consisting of senior individuals in each partnership agency who will act as an engagement “champion” within their organisation will also be established. This group will take a strategic role in the planning of engagement activities and work closely with employees working at an operational level to monitor and evaluate community engagement. To be effective the network will need the involvement of senior decision makers and Councillors.

It is recognised that different agencies across the partnership have different statutory responsibilities and different needs. This may mean that these agencies may need to engage independently with the community. The purpose of this network is to share the planning and information from independent engagement activities between partnership agencies.

The network and champions will support the delivery of the strategic priorities and will ensure that there is a focus on localism. We recognise that Halton is comprised of many communities, each with different needs and priorities, and the network will ensure that this is accounted for in engagement planning.

The network and champions will be the key resources in supporting Councillors to take an active and effective role in engaging with the communities they represent.

7.3.4. Engagement Standards

As a partnership we are committed to ensuring that all of our engagement activities are efficient and productive. To ensure we continue to allow local residents the appropriate opportunities to get involved and influence decisions and service delivery we will develop a set of engagement standards that all planned activities will have to meet. This will ensure a consistent approach to delivering high quality and cost-effective engagement activity and ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to further involve residents and feedback on further developments. These standards will be based on the principles of effective engagement outlined earlier in this document.

These standards will ensure all engagement activity is recorded accurately and this record is stored and available appropriately. This will ensure an accurate history of engagement activity is maintained and an evidence base is available.

7.3.5. Service Plans

Community engagement activity will be included in all service and delivery plans across the partnership, ensuring that managers know in advance how and when they will be engaging with the community.

7.3.4. Community Engagement Toolkit

The partnership will review, update and publicise the existing community engagement toolkit to ensure it meets the needs of the partnership and the community.

7.3.6. Open information

All information received and produced through engagement activity will be available publicly through the consultation finder, which will be accessible through the partnership website, unless there is a clear and convincing reason for not disclosing this information.

7.3.7 Value for Money

We will include in our engagement framework and standards a commitment to ensure that our residents receive best value for money at all times. We will ensure residents have a chance to make their views heard on whether they feel the partnership is providing value for money in its engagement activities.

7.4. **Objective 4: Innovative engagement**

“We are committed to exploring new and creative ways of engaging with the communities we serve and maximising the potential of new technologies”.

We will endeavour to continue to be creative in our goal of maximising engagement opportunities for the residents of Halton. We will explore

different avenues and methods by which we can engage fully with every member of our community. We will use a combination of traditional and innovative methods to ensure opportunities to engage on all issues are available and made known to everybody in the community.

7.4.1. eConsultation and Social Media

The partnership is committed to finding effective new and innovative methods to ensure access to engagement for every individual in our communities. We are committed to exploring the opportunities that using social media affords us. The coalition government led the way with their “your freedom” website, which allowed anyone in Britain to make suggestions to the government, and with their “transparency number 10” website which allows the public to view a large amount of government data. It is clear that online engagement is an increasing part of the national and local agenda. As a partnership we are committed to continuing the Council’s electronic consultation programme and sharing this capacity across agencies.

Throughout the UK more local residents are using social networks than are reading local newspapers.³ These tools are becoming as big a part of our society’s infrastructure as telephones and television. Using these tools allows us the chance to be open and transparent with the communities we serve whilst providing them with opportunities to engage with local services and make a difference in their delivery.

Using social media also offers great value for money for the partnership – and therefore the public. All money spent in the public sector is public money. We are committed to finding ways to make your money go further. A recent study into customer service interactions lists web transaction costs at 27p on average, compared with phone transactions of £3.22 and face-to-face transactions of £6.56. Using social media for engagement where appropriate has the potential to save millions of pounds of public money.

Social media can enable service providers to make their public information notices available to a far greater number of people at very little extra costs. Information is instantaneous and people can forward messages on. This can help in situations of extreme weather, school closures, travel disruptions or public safety messages. It can also allow the public to give information to service providers, allowing the public to operate like a mobile workforce, reporting problems that need addressing in their local area. Social media allows us to open the channels of communication with the public all day, every day, and in real time.

It can also be used to encourage users to become more involved in their communities in a variety of ways. Using social media we can encourage people to become involved by volunteering and other forms of civic participation. We can run campaigns on local issues such as racism or graffiti. We can connect local councillors to the people they represent. We can create a sense of community and belonging by connecting local people.

³ Improvement and Development Agency, “*Local by Social*”, (March, 2010), p8;

The partnership needs to improve and increase its use of electronic consultation solutions. The Council currently runs a system, Quask, which has an online consultation capability. The partnership is committed to developing a framework for eConsultation and ensuring that officers have the IT capability to carry out these activities.

7.4.2. Facebook

Facebook currently provides the biggest opportunity for the partnership to utilise social media to interact with the community. There are 25 million active Facebook users in the UK, approximately 45% of the population. A recent study reported that it takes just five months for a piece of information to reach 50 million users through Facebook and 13 years through television.⁴ As a free to use tool Facebook offers the partnership an opportunity to add to the tools that we have with which we can increase the depth and breadth of our community engagement. Facebook also offers the opportunity for residents to provide feedback on local services and events.

The Halton Strategic Partnership will investigate the feasibility of creating and running a community Facebook account, and monitor and regularly review other opportunities to utilise social media to engage with the public. This would increase the partnership's online presence and provide a real time information service. The use of social media will not be used to replace other methods of community engagement, but can be used as one part of the toolkit of engagement methods.

7.4.3. Twitter and other social media

Twitter also offers opportunities for the partnership to deliver real time updates to residents. This could be used to deliver up-to-date news such as local election results, traffic warnings, missing people appeals and to further publicise events and services. The partnership will investigate the option of using Twitter.

We understand that social media and digital communication is a fast-changing environment. We will continue to explore new ways of using innovative communication methods.

7.4.4. Website development

The partnership will consider using its website to host meaningful two-way dialogue with members of our communities, allowing them to make comments and ask questions of the partnership, as well as to discuss issues between each other.

7.4.5. Consultation Finder

We will promote the use of the Council's consultation finder. This database holds information on previous consultations held, summaries of results and

⁴ Clouds, Crowds and Customers: Transforming Government Services in an Era of 'Business as Unusual'. Dr Nicola J. Millard

any accompanying reports, as well as details and arrangements of planned future consultations. This tool will be made available and used by all members of the partnership to plan joined up engagement activities. This will allow all partners access and use of previous consultation results which will act as check on repeated consultations. It will also allow the same results to be used a number of times to maximise their usability and impact.

7.4.6. Community Media

The partnership will consider extending its use of community radio and TV to publicise services and events in the area.

7.5. **Objective 5: Using and responding to citizen initiated engagement.**

“We are committed to maximising the impact of all contact we have with residents, including those which are initiated by the individual”.

Citizen initiated engagement simply means instances where the citizen has made the first contact. This could be to make a query, to compliment the partnership on services delivered, to make suggestions for improvement or to make a complaint. The partnership is determined that no feedback on its services should be ignored or forgotten. We need to use all possible engagement opportunities to inform our service review and development. It is clear that not all citizen contacts with agencies of the partnership can be recorded. However, we will set up mechanisms to capture as much qualitative information from these contacts as possible.

7.5.1. Complaints, compliments and enquiries

All complaints will be categorised and logged. The categorisation data will be analysed on a regular basis to identify any patterns in services or topics that are the subject of complaint. This information will be regularly fed through to service managers to use in service reviews.

Similarly, all compliments will be categorised and logged to identify high performing areas and good practice can be identified and shared.

Subjects of enquiries will also be logged on the Customer Relationship Management system. The CRM system is currently run by the Council. The partnership will investigate the feasibility of storing records of all instances of citizen initiated engagement across the partnership in one place. This will be used as a measure of public interest in services that the partnership provides. It will also act as a monitor of public perception of services available.

7.5.2. Responding

As a partnership we do not believe that a standard letter always counts as a full response. We want to know that the resident is fully satisfied with the response we give to their enquiry. We will give every resident the opportunity to rate the response that they received through a variety of media. This

information will be used to follow-up cases of dissatisfaction and monitor our success across every agency of the partnership. This information will be made available to the public.

7.5.3. Customer Service Standards

We will ensure that all of our contact with members of the public meets the Council's Customer Service Excellence Standards in order to ensure a timely and quality response to customer contacts.

8. **Outcomes and Monitoring**

8.1 Outcomes

The key outcomes that will define the success of this strategy are:

- The creation and maintenance of a Community Engagement Network, with input from all strategic partners, senior management and Councillors which meets regularly and facilitates shared planning and information on engagement activities;
- An increase in participation in engagement activity from hard-to-reach groups;
- members are fully supported to lead on and regularly partake in community engagement;
- the creation of a framework and standards for planning, delivery and monitoring of engagement activity which are used across the strategic partnership;
- a multi-agency approach to community engagement is established and functioning;
- An increase in use of social media and other modern technologies for engaging with the community;
- Increased neighbourhood satisfaction at local level and with Halton as a whole.

The Halton Strategic Partnership Board will take the lead in monitoring the delivery and success of the strategy. The success of the strategy will be measured against the outcomes stated above.

8.2 Outcome Measures

To ensure the success of the strategy we need to set outcome measures for each of our strategic objectives. These outcome measures are incorporated in to the action plan.

8.3 Monitoring

The success of this strategy will be measured by the outcomes defined in the action plan. We will create a "Community Engagement Health check" self-assessment for each organisation to complete on an annual basis. This will

monitor each organisation's progress against our strategic objectives and the action plan. Each partnership organisation will name an officer who has responsibility for implementation within their organisation. There will be an annual review of milestones and outcomes which will be the responsibility of the Halton Strategic Partnership's Equalities, Engagement and Cohesion board.

8.4 Delivery

This strategy will be delivered in each organisation through senior management. Each organisation will nominate a senior management representative as a "Community Engagement Champion" who will be responsible for delivering this strategy within their organisation.

10. Action Plan

Objective 1: Citizen focused local decision making				
<i>“We are committed to ensuring community and individual input in to the local decision making process. We will ensure that all decisions taken are focused on the needs of individuals and the local community, and that those affected are given meaningful opportunities to help make those decisions.”</i>				
What?	Who?	When?	How?	Measure
Support Councillors to play a leading role in community engagement	HBC Community Development Community Development Practitioners Forum Members' Services	Continuous	Monthly Member briefing Member training Engagement with neighbourhood workers Links to Area Panels and funding streams	Increased resident participation at local area forums.
Continue to produce area profiles and share this information across the partnership.	HBC Research and Intelligence	Continuous	Available across the partnership electronically	Regular area profiles published and available to partners
Develop a set of guidelines for the usage of mystery shoppers/youth inspectors for partnership services	HBC Community Development Team/HBC Corporate and Organisational Policy Team/YOT	April 2012	Incorporated into revised Community Engagement toolkit	New toolkit published and in use
Increase awareness of existing engagement mechanisms across the partnerships	HBC Community Development Team/HBC Corporate and Organisational Policy Team	April 2012	Incorporated into revised toolkit Consultation finder or similar database rolled out across partnership	New toolkit published and in use

Objective 2: Accessible and inclusive engagement				
<i>“We are committed to ensuring that each and every citizen in Halton has equal opportunity to make their voice heard and influence decisions that affect them. We will ensure appropriate mechanisms are in place to ensure everybody’s access needs are identified and accounted for.”</i>				
What?	Who?	When?	How?	Measure
Monitor all participation in engagement activity by protected characteristics Identify groups who are unengaged	Community Engagement Strategy Steering Group/Community Engagement champions	Annually in April	Audit each agency to ensure they are monitoring – include as part of Community Engagement Health check	All engagement events to show equality monitoring statistics
Regularly report monitoring information against area demographics to analyse representation	Nominated officers within organisations/Community Engagement Strategy Steering Group	Annually in April	Community Engagement Health check	Health check self-assessment
Create and maintain database of community and representative groups in Halton	Community Engagement Representatives/Community Engagement Steering Group	April 2012	Hosted on partnership website, updated by officers across the partnership	Database set up and up to date
Provide evidence-based guidance on how to identify and reach hard-to-reach groups	HBC Community Development Team/Corporate and Organisational Policy	December 2011	To form part of the revised Community Engagement Toolkit	Increased engagement with hard to reach groups – evidenced through Community Engagement Health check
Develop guidance to improve effective engagement with unengaged groups in partnership with residents’ groups	HBC Community Development Team/HBC Corporate and Organisational Policy Team	April 2012	To form part of the revised Community Engagement Toolkit Include resident’s groups in the developments of these guidelines	New toolkit published and in use

Objective 3: Open, efficient and effective engagement				
<i>“We are committed to ensuring that all of our engagement activities make a tangible and positive impact on the community and represent best value for money at all times”.</i>				
What?	Who?	When?	How?	Measure
Nominate a “champion” of engagement in each organisation from senior management to take responsibility for the strategy	All partners	December 2011	Senior management to nominate	List of Community Engagement champions published on partnership website
Produce a Community Engagement self-assessment “health check” and conduct on an annual basis to monitor success of the strategy	All partners/Corporate and Organisational Policy Team (HBC)	Annually in April	Health checks submitted to HBC Corporate & Organisational Policy Team/Performance & Improvement	All partners submitting health check
Promote the use of the Consultation Finder across the partnership	HBC Research & Intelligence	December 2012	Market Consultation Finder through partnership newsletters	Increased partnership use of the Consultation Finder
Provide training to partnership officers on the use of the consultation finder	HBC Research & Intelligence	December 2012	Organised training with engagement officers across the partnership	Increased partnership use of the Consultation Finder
Conduct joint consultations/engagement whenever possible	HBC Community Development/Corporate & Organisational Policy Team	December 2012	Joint planning and use of the consultation finder Guidelines to be incorporated into new toolkit	Increased number of joined up consultations
Identify all strategies, policies and statements	HBC Corporate & Organisational Policy	December 2011	New Community Engagement page on	New page created, all old strategies/policies

across the partnership that deal with community engagement and incorporate them in to the new framework.	Team		partnership website with up to date information. Market new strategy and framework to ensure awareness.	removed from website/intranet.
Promote the principles of “ask once use many times” with engagement practitioners across the partnership	Community Engagement Champions	April 2012	Marketing campaign	Increased joined-up working and information sharing across the partnership
Develop a set of agreed standards that all engagement activity must meet including planning, venues etc	HBC Corporate & Organisational Policy Team	December 2012	Create “Community Engagement Charter” for partners to sign up to Agencies sign up in own strategies and include in overarching strategy	Charter published and full partnership sign up
Review and revise the current Community Engagement Toolkit and promote its use across the partnership	HBC Community Development team/HBC Corporate & Organisational Policy Team	April 2012	Item on toolkit included in newsletters and on intranet Available on partnership website	New toolkit published and in use
Re-establish the Community Engagement Network	HBC Community Development	April 2012	Contact all engagement officers across the partnership, organise quarterly meetings. Senior management to acknowledge nomination of champion	Community Engagement Network meeting regularly
Feed information from	HBC Research &	April 2013	Information sent to	Regular information

Consultation Finder into Area Forums and members' briefings	Intelligence		organisers	included on Area Forums and member briefings
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Objective 4: Innovative engagement

“We are committed to exploring new and creative ways of engaging with the communities we serve and maximising the potential of new technologies”.

What?	Who?	When?	How?	Measure
Develop agreed standards for conducting surveys via electronic means	HBC Research & Intelligence/Corporate & Organisational Policy Team	December 2012	Publishing standards	Published standards
Develop the partnership website to allow interaction with users	HBC Marketing	December 2014	Partnership website to be brought “in-house” and developed	Partnership website used interactively by partners and residents
Develop a social media strategy and protocol to promote and co-ordinate the use of social media across the partnership	HBC Corporate & Organisational Policy Team/HBC Marketing	December 2014	Social media strategy sub-group to be set up to coordinate the use of social media and develop the strategy	Strategy published

Objective 5: Using and responding to customer initiated engagement

“We are committed to maximising the impact of all contact we have with residents, including those which are initiated by the individual”.

What?	Who?	When?	How?	Measure
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Organise annual engagement conference to feedback on progress of strategy	HBC Corporate & Organisational Policy Team	Annually in April	Organised by HBC Corporate & Organisational Policy Team	Event held
Set up monitoring and analysis systems for comments, compliments and complaints to monitor trends	All partners	April 2012	To be decided by each partner	Number of complaints reported to Community Engagement Strategy steering group on an annual basis Health check item
Develop "You said we did" standards of communication with engaged groups Add 'did it happen?/were you satisfied?' element	HBC Corporate & Organisational Policy Team	December 2011	Incorporated into revised toolkit	New toolkit published Health check Evaluations Feedback at next year's conference
Customer Service Standards published across the partnership	All partners to publish their standards	December 2012	All partners to make their Customer Service Standards available publicly	Standards published and available to public Included in Community Engagement Health check