



Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership

Community Engagement Framework

Delivery of stage 1a:
Current engagement activity and best practice

Community engagement best practice desktop research and recommendations

Final Submission to the CEF Project Board

1st March 2009

Accompanying documents:

Feedback report, giving details of the responses to the stakeholder and partner surveys including copies of the questionnaires that were used.

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1 General introduction

Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership (LDLSP) is establishing a Community Engagement Framework (CEF). A project board has been established to oversee the development of the framework. They have developed a plan for preparing and adopting a community engagement framework that aims to ensure it reflects the local context, responds to new government policy and guidance on community engagement and meets the ambition of partnership members to improve the profile, accountability and responsiveness of the Partnership, to bring about improvements in the lives of all residents.

It is the aim of the project board is to have the framework in place by mid 2009 and for it to provide a coherent methodology for all partners to adopt when engaging with the community. The Partnership wishes this framework to reflect best practice nationally and internationally and so ensure LDLSP becomes increasingly innovative and effective in its work.

The first part of the development of the Framework (1a) is to better understand the existing community engagement work of partnership members, identify models of best practice that can inform the local framework, and understand better how current engagement practice is viewed by Voluntary, Community and Business sector organisations.

Later stages of the project (1b) will involve more targeted research into the experiences and attitudes of residents and community members, particularly from under represented, hidden or marginalised communities to engage with the partnership.

It is planned this will be followed by a public event to feedback from the research and receive comments on a working draft, to enable the creation of a community engagement charter and toolkit that all Partners can adopt.

Desk and internet based research

I have undertaken a web and paper based review of good practice in community engagement, using contacts and knowledge derived from my work with the Participatory Budgeting Unit (PBU), as a community activist involved in regeneration partnerships, working for a voluntary sector infrastructure organisation, as a non executive director of a north west Primary Care trust (PCT), and from my experience at Lancaster University as Social Enterprise Research Associate.

Building on an Executive Summary will be a longer report giving links to specific case studies of good practice, a series of links and references to further reading, and an overview of the research undertaken.

I propose ideas for how a local community engagement framework might be developed in a way that leads towards greater community and citizen awareness of, empowerment through, and influence on the work of the partnership.

Outputs from the work

The final reporting includes:

- Description of research, sample questionnaires, relevant contact lists
- Record of responses received
- Summary of the results
- Report for project board from best practice research
- Proposals to inform the development of the framework
- Presentation on the findings to a meeting of the project board.

I met with the Project Board towards the end of the study to verbally feed back on my findings and present draft findings. This has led to a refining of the recommendations, the feedback report and improvements to the research report. Though evidence from the scoping survey is important, the interpretation and the conclusions are as valuable in informing the development of the framework. It should be noted that statistical inferences can't be made due to the limited sample size.

Outcomes from the work

The information from this study aims to:

- Improve understanding of the current state of community engagement practice in the district
- Facilitate future consultation with the community being separately commissioned by the Project Board (1b)
- Contribute to the development of the wider community engagement framework for LDLSP

This report is written with a wide audience in mind. Whilst it does inevitably contain technical words and jargon I have tried to avoid using the language of public organisations too much. Engagement practices by their nature must aim to be accessible.

A useful glossary to many of the terms used in this report is available at <http://www.cdx.org.uk/resources/community-development-glossary>

2 Executive Summary

Community engagement is best seen as process. It is not an outcome or activity to be delivered in and of itself, in isolation to other activities such as service delivery, performance management or economic regeneration. Community engagement is a dialogue, the outcomes of which should not be pre-determined or assumed. The outcomes can take years to show and it can be hard to isolate or quantify what precisely has changed and why.

There are many **tools and techniques** used across the world to engage with communities, and also some **common principles**. The first thing to appreciate is that there is no one model or method that is correct. Community engagement practice must be contextualised, and so made locally relevant, based on the adoption of collectively debated and agreed high level principles.

Community engagement theory owes a huge debt to the '**ladder of participation**', a model for understanding community engagement that both describes different levels of engagement, but also describes **a route towards greater empowerment and opportunity**. This is achieved by adopting good practice in community development to enable the purposeful movement of 'communities' up the ladder of participation.

Engagement is not static and, if it is done correctly, leads to change in the way power and opportunity is exercised. It is fundamentally concerned with understanding why power is not evenly distributed, and then finding ways that power can be shared.

Some interpretations of the ladder of participation use the idea of **a spectrum of engagement**. In effect the ladder is turned onto its side. Engagement then takes place under a number of headings, such as 'inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower'. Whilst this is useful to describe what is happening, it dilutes the developmental nature of engagement as a route to empowerment.

There is scope for considerable **confusion about what the term 'community' actually describes**, and whether 'engagement' also implies increased influence and empowerment. The terms are very fluid, loosely used and highly subjective. Therefore care and time needs to be taken in creating a foundation for community engagement about which all can feel confident.

Rushing into 'doing' engagement creates the opportunity for mistrust, misunderstanding and missed opportunity. It is like talking at some-one, not talking with them. This is particularly important given the complex network of partnerships that exist locally and **complex layering of responsibility** for directing and delivering public services within the district.

Within Lancaster District there are many committed individuals who believe that better community engagement makes a difference and is worthwhile. There are examples of good practice at the individual and the institutional level. This commitment needs better promotion, with the champions for and leaders in engagement feeling valued and supported.

There is however a difference between how engagement is perceived internally and more widely. My research into how engagement is viewed amongst 'stakeholders',

particularly in the voluntary and community sector, shows that **many are feeling frustrated** about perceived difficulties in influencing public services, of getting their concerns and expertise recognised and responded to, and that there are opportunities being missed to find better ways of doing things.

This is not unique to Lancaster District and is a common experience across the UK. Guidance on community engagement recognises the deep challenges of partnership working, and the importance of finding the right balance between representative and participatory democracy. Change is difficult and will take time. What is important is to fix on the long term vision and retain a flexible approach.

At the end of this report I have made a number of recommendations for how to approach community engagement work. The Project board is invited to review the report and use these to inform the next stage of the development of the LDLSP community engagement framework.

Highlights of the recommendations are:

- Differentiate between short term and ongoing forms of engagement
- Longer term engagement is more likely to be empowering – repeating processes are essential to build up trust
- Improve partnership processes and communication within the LDLSP
- See engagement as a developmental process – moving people up the ladder through building social capital
- Adopt a clear model for engagement, based on high level principles rather than specific tools

In summary:

Taking from one of the responses to the partnership survey:

“Many factors contribute to a lack of effective strategic partnerships between lay communities and statutory organisations. These factors fall into five domains:

- *the community's capacity to engage;*
- *the skills and competencies of organisational staff;*
- *the dominant professional service culture;*
- *the overall organisational ethos and culture; and*
- *the dynamics of the local and national political systems.” ****

In designing its community engagement framework LDLSP should respond to each of these five factors in some way. My recommendation is that at some point in the development of the framework an accessible, multi-stakeholder and broad-based local conference is convened, supported by independent and experienced facilitation, to design and agree the high level values that must underpin community empowerment, and identify ways to address the five issues listed above.

***North Lancashire NHS offered these references to their approach to community engagement as part of their submission to the survey of community engagement : from Pickin, C. Popay, J. Staley, K. Bruce, N. Jones, C. Gowman, N. (2001) Promoting Organisational Capacity to Engage with Active Lay Communities: Developing a Model to Support Organizational Change for Health. Journal of Health Service Research and Policy

3 Overview of community engagement

3.1 Why do community engagement?

Through my work with the Participatory Budgeting Unit (a leading proponent of community engagement best practice), of working within the public sector, and of being a community activist and community development worker, I have spent considerable time considering this question. The simple answer is that community engagement should make a difference. It should change the way things are done, hopefully for the betterment of all. If it does not lead to change it is empty and meaningless term and a pointless process.

I feel there are likely to be three primary motivations when undertaking 'community engagement', (or as it is now frequently known 'community empowerment' – the preferred terminology of the Department of Communities and Local Government.)

My feeling is that there are three primary reasons why empowerment matters:

- **To respond to a 'democratic deficit' in our society:** There is recognition that too few people engage with democratic processes, there are issues of low levels of trust in local councillors and politicians, and young people in particular are less likely to vote or take part on democratic processes than before. Finding new ways of engaging, through participatory democracy, you can strengthen representative democracy.
- **To improve the effectiveness of service delivery:** Public services are widely perceived to being overly bureaucratic, wasteful of resources and remote. Fixed in historical ways of working from an internalised, risk averse culture, and poor at investing in innovation. By engaging more with citizens and communities they become more responsive, more effective, and better able to target resources to areas of need and so bring about an equality of opportunity.
- **To empower all the individuals that make up a community.** There is much talk recently of 'broken Britain', which is short-hand used to describe a widely perceived breakdown in how we collaborate, respect and enable others. We fail to share common values, or make the best of our opportunities. Social isolation, poverty and exclusion mean many cannot enjoy the benefits of the wealth that others enjoy or the freedoms they take for granted. Through community engagement we can help re-build communities, supporting families in need, inspiring greater cohesion, sharing skills and building positive social capital.

Before you can proceed very far one fundamental issue to consider is whether you believe community describes a positive 'state of being', or describes a 'process or practice' with which we individually and collectively engage. We may understand or know 'a community' when we experience it, but community isn't 'god-given' and it doesn't just exist.

We can be part of many communities at once, and community can exist or be associated with a sense of place, or be based on our networks, our perceptions and our interests. Community is both a cause of, and an outcome of our ever changing human interactions.

3.2 Defining community engagement

Defining ‘community’, and therefore defining ‘community engagement’, is incredibly difficult, as we change what we mean by the word community in different contexts. It is one of those terms, like ‘broken Britain’ that means different things to different people, even within the same situation.

Community is therefore a subjective term raising a number of difficult questions.

- Can we be part of a community or engage with a community without contributing to it or being changed by the experience?
- When exactly do we go about engaging with or within a community, and how do we know our engagement has made a difference?
- Whose language should we use, as ‘language’ (and its precursors, such as ‘jargon’ or dialect) is both an outcome and a determinant of community? Our language helps us identify with a community, is made by community, and yet is also a barrier between communities and individuals.
- Does partnership build community? After we have made our commitment (our engagement) and carried out that commitment do we inevitably come to share a common language and a deeper mutual understanding.
- How is community linked to identity and individual empowerment? How is our sense of place and identity linked?

As we move from individual to collective action we necessarily experience ever more complex communities. Indeed we may come to belong to many different communities at once, not necessarily with consistent values. Potentially causing conflict and uncertainty within the individual, who may feel a need to identify with different ‘communities’ at different times. Given community is such a fluid term it may be helpful to go right back to the roots of the words ‘community’ and also ‘engagement’.

Definitions of community with my associated commentary

Definition	Commentary
A social group whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, or have a common heritage.	<i>This reflects both the geographic and time based nature of community. Residence alone is not sufficient, with membership of a community requiring a stable relationship with others over time.</i>
A locality inhabited by such a group.	<i>Community and place are closely connected. Identity with a place and a sense of belonging are important components of being part of a community. It is therefore important to respect the names and boundaries that people understand and use themselves rather than impose your own names and boundaries on others.</i>
A social, religious, occupational, or other group perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the society within which it exists.	<i>This brings out that naming a particular group as a community can be an externally imposed ‘label’. It is easy for outsiders to perceive there is a community where none exists, and for ‘communities of interest’ to create boundaries aimed at defining some sense of difference to others.</i>
Joint possession, enjoyment or liability, a community of property.	<i>Community enables us to share our resources to mutual advantage. Local government is an opportunity to practise community on a big scale and reap the</i>

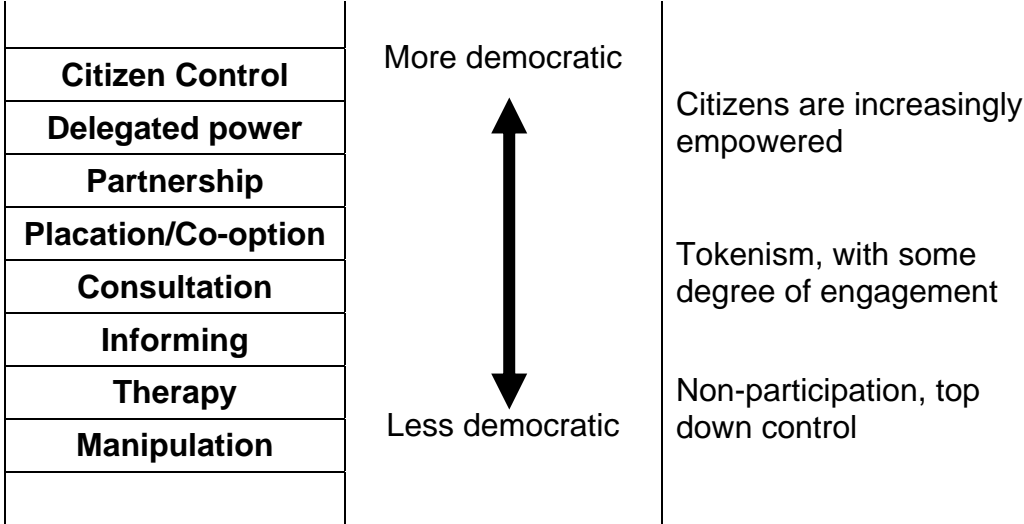
	<i>benefits of partnership work and coordinated action. Community implies a sharing of risk too, as in some circumstances we will need to entrust decision-making power to others.</i>
A group of associated nations or bodies sharing common interests or a common heritage or an assemblage of interacting populations occupying a given area.	<i>A community can be made up of individuals or of groups, but cannot easily contain both. So it is important to clear who you aim to engage with - individuals within a community or the representatives of community groups. One engagement process is unlikely to reach both. This has connections to how the Voluntary, Community and Faith sectors (VCFS) are often misunderstood as being 'representative of the community' or not.</i>
A group of men or women leading a common life according to a rule.	<i>This more religious meaning of community brings out the issue of self-governance within community and the importance of people choosing to self-impose restrictions on themselves for the benefit of some higher purpose or ideal. Purpose, common commitment, equality and trust underlie a strong community.</i>

Definitions of "Engagement" with my associated commentary

Definition	Commentary
Battle: a hostile meeting of opposing forces in the course of a war.	<i>This draws out the danger of unequal power relationships. Whilst not necessarily leading to winners and losers engagement does carry the risk of dominance by the strong over the weak. To limit the destructive potential of conflict, before engaging it is important to have a flexible strategy that allows you to respond to the realities on the ground.</i>
A meeting arranged in advance	<i>Engagement requires planning and the ability to respond to the needs of those being engaged with. Both parties must be prepared to come together</i>
Betrothal, a mutual promise to marry	<i>Engagement should result in a firm commitment based on trust and sharing, and a shared vision of the future. Engagement needs time.</i>
Employment: the act of giving someone a job	<i>Engagement contains an implicit contract between the partners, a clear agreement on how resources will be re-distributed, and how decisions will be made.</i>
Contact by fitting together; "the engagement of the clutch"; "the meshing of gears"	<i>Engagement should have a purpose, be efficient and based on close and continual contact. The support structure needs to be robust to survive the wear and tear of continual close engagement.</i>
The act of sharing in the activities of a group	<i>Engagement means a responsibility to take action yourself as part of the deal. Engagement can create community, when there is a common interest, a sense of commitment and good coordination.</i>

3.3 The ladder of participation.

Central government policy on community engagement in the UK is heavily influenced by the idea of a 'Ladder of Participation'. First Described by Sherry Arnstein in 1969 the ladder has been adapted many times and been adopted worldwide. Below is a version of the original ladder of participation



Arnstein' has been re-interpreted in a variety of ways, but the underlying message is clear. Community engagement can occur at a number of levels, with the degree of citizen influence increasing as you move up the ladder.

This model has greatly influenced community development practice which has used it to:

- Describe the ways communities or citizens may have an influence or not
- Describe how we can move forward by helping ourselves and others climb the ladder toward a more democratic, effective and egalitarian society.

An important aspect of community development is helping people to understand where on the ladder they sit, and therefore how much influence they can expect to have. It will reduce conflict and disappointment to start from a more realistic position. Claiming to be acting in partnership when actually you are simply informing will only lead to distrust.

Once your position is better understood you can begin to act to improve your ability to influence the wider world to your benefit. With the appropriate knowledge, methods and experience local authorities can create more empowered citizens and help those with little influence gain a stronger voice and a greater stake in society. However the ladder also implies those with power are relinquishing control in some way.

I would describe this as a process of achieving a state of democratic maturity. In a similar way to how parents can empower their offspring to take on ever greater challenges, so community leaders, elected members and local government workers have a role in improving society and in citizen empowerment through the democratic process.

3.4 Elected representatives and community voices

The UK has been experiencing what has been called a crisis of participation, or the democratic deficit. Too few people are voting in local or national elections and over the long term numbers continue to decline. Survey after survey report citizens feel government is both inefficient and unresponsive. Though people may wish to influence things (and there is evidence many do), few believe they can. Politics and politicians have been probably unfairly labelled through our media as untrustworthy, and political activism through political party membership is on the wane. There is considerable and hot debate about the extent to which people wish to participate, how they wish to participate and whether that participation is needed. (see for example the report “disconnected citizens” by the Social Market Foundation at <http://www.smf.co.uk/disconnected-citizens.html>)

So government has recently put considerable effort into the whole subject of empowerment and efficient local government, through a number of recent reforms such as the new Duty to Involve and a plethora of strategies, policies and initiatives spanning most if not all government departments.

Elected members retain a key role as the democratically elected representatives of geographic communities. Particularly in local government many councillors are in close daily contact with geographic communities as well as communities of interest. They rightfully defend their role as the counterbalance to private interest, central government interference and burgeoning bureaucracy, as well as defending local over national interests. They decide council tax levels and agree the budgets of the local authority.

Councillors rightly feel frustrated by a centralisation of power in Whitehall, the apathy of voters, and the need to negotiate with public agencies outside of direct local democratic control, (health authorities, police, regional development agencies and so forth.)

At the same time there has been a strong push to devolve decision making and set up new collaborative bodies. Such as our own Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership (LDLSP). Bodies designed to promote growth, address inequalities, coordinate expenditure and increase collaboration in the delivery of services. Partnership working has become the norm. It can be argued this only reflects an underlying desire to move everyone up ‘the ladder of participation’.

Alongside elected members new voices drawn from the wider community have been invited to the partnership table. The Voluntary, Community and Faith Sectors (VCFS) are seen as essential partners alongside public bodies. Often this is because of their good connections and expertise in working within diverse communities of interest, particularly in marginalised or deprived populations.

Sometimes their work is funded by the state and sometimes by charitable means, by using volunteers and by various types of social enterprise. The VCFS sector plays a key role alongside public agencies in delivering essential services and can represent the voices of their clients and members within the partnership.

3.5 The rise of the stakeholder

Partnership working often raises the issue of who speaks for 'the community'. Who are the active voices, who are those 'in the know', and what legitimacy and expertise do they bring. As we have seen community is a multi-faceted concept containing both mutual and self interest. Therefore we must be mindful to be clear what we mean by community engagement in a partnership, and develop structures that mediate against those with specific interests holding onto power and which can facilitate greater participation.

Problems in defining community has recently lead to the adoption of some new terminology, sometimes taken from private business and also inspired by the third sector, community development and grassroots empowerment organisations. Many people working in community engagement or partnerships now prefer to talk of stakeholders.

Broadly everyone will be affected by the actions of others to some degree. To reduce our risk of clashing with others and to help achieve our goals we need to be aware of the effect we are having on our stakeholders. Stakeholders can be both internal and external (that is, part of our own partnership (community) or not)). They also vary through the way we relate to them. Some stakeholders may not be interested in engaging with us, others wish close and constant involvement

Using the concept of the stakeholder changes the dynamics of partnerships, as the concept of representativeness is not easy in a multi-stakeholder world. Not all of our stakeholder relationships are equal so the concept of 'one person one vote' does not necessarily hold true. Instead we must create a more sophisticated structure that can process and balance the differing interests of stakeholders.

Partnership working particularly for public bodies can become a complex juggling act, with a continually redefining of roles as commissioner and provider, of supplier and purchaser, of representative or customer. Building consensus through stakeholder working requires leadership and a transparent process, with the adoption of agreed values based around participation, accountability and equality.

3.6 Listening to not speaking for: The customer is always right?

Efficiency in local government has traditionally been driven by a managerial or target driven culture. Performance is measured internally and then externally verified by elected members, by audit agencies and by central government. Public services have long held a reputation for inefficiency, stemming, critics often say, from an internalised and bureaucratic control and command culture. Perversely criticisms about efficiency have probably led to more bureaucracy, which in turn has lead to further criticism.

Whether this negative perception is well informed or true is perhaps less important than the fact there is a widespread perception that all is not right. This is why good two way communication is vital - to inform about what is happening so people can access opportunities, and to hear what they want so you can provide the right service.

Government policy has also been inspired by private business models, with emphasis on a strong 'customer' focus. Within private businesses brand reputation, innovation and financial return is seen as important signposts to success. Effective private companies understand their customers, and put in considerable effort to avoid taking them for granted. Ensuring they can get feedback not only from sales figures, but also through their marketing and promotional work, by listening to complaints, by market research, focus groups and the like.

Private business will aim to create greater customer loyalty by offering good service and good value, and by responding quickly to any complaints. They study the habits and attitudes of existing customers and listening also to their potential customers, thereby hopefully providing what the customer wants.

Public services aren't quite like that. Traditionally it is the taxpayer, not the customer or service recipient who pays, and profit is not the best indicator of success. This increases the complexity of any decision making, as there is a confused lines of communication between customer, councillor, service provider, commissioner and taxpayer.

3.7 Modernising the way public money is being managed

On top of this are important changes in the way resources (i.e. taxpayers money) are now being dispersed throughout the system, such as:

- Commissioning processes and community engagement within the Health economy is a big issue, with the expansion of the internal markets and a move in some areas towards individualised budgets and a choice of providers.
- Control (ring-fencing) of education and social care budgets is being shifted towards partnerships and trusts operating at the local level.
- Greater freedoms and flexibilities in the way local councils can operate, with three year settlements, and more freedom borrow and invest financially
- Greater control of personal or individual budgets and devolution of budgets to ward councillors.
- Youth services are also moving towards more direct control over public money by young people. Schools are moving towards increased control by parent governors or private sponsors.
- New initiatives like participatory budgeting reflect ever greater devolution of control over local investment and the opening up of budget making processes to more participatory forms of democracy.

Community engagement should therefore be seen as a part of a much wider modernisation of local government. Encompassing a move towards developing transparent, responsive, stakeholder led services through bodies such as LDLSP. It involves emphasis on agreeing a common vision and then communicating and acting on that vision. Demanding effective performance backed by good corporate governance and clear accountability.

Engagement is integral to developing more effective and targeted delivery, to joint budget setting and to better service planning. It represents a cultural shift that will be challenging and take years to achieve maturity. The aim should be a better, more open system for all. Success will be built on practical actions, not vague intentions,

and along the way there will be conflicts, risks, and mistakes. Overcoming the challenges will require trust best generated through open debate.

Opening up LSPs to the voluntary, community and faith sector is one form of community engagement in practice. Therefore how a partnership works and how inclusive it feels will have effects on other areas of engagement. I therefore think it is worth making some comments about the realities of partnership working.

3.8 Reality Check: Clarity over partnership roles and responsibilities

In a multi-stakeholder environment or within a partnership involving bodies of very different scale and organisational culture it is important to be sure participants understand their individual role, and agree on where decision making and accountability should lie.

This requires clear and consistent messages from an informed, enabling and active leadership. Partnership requires a cooperative psychological contract and will break down if an inappropriately coercive or calculative management style alienates those potentially free to withdraw from the relationship.

3.9 Reality Check: Capacity, commitment and unreal expectations

Engagement and partnership takes commitment and resources, along with supportive structures and informed and empowered staff and representatives. It requires a clear commitment of time and resources that needs to be transparent, deliverable and sustainable. It is time consuming and it needs patience to manage and make engagement processes work.

In practice, this often translates into dedicated staff time for facilitation and administration of partnership meetings - the amount and depth of information at meetings tends to be high, so actual or potential attendees need practical support. The meetings won't 'just keep happening' by themselves.

Declaring that you are succeeding too early in a process, or overstating what can be achieved will lead to frustration and potential conflict that might be avoided. Holding to a well developed long term vision is more important than looking for quick wins.

3.10 Reality Check: Moving from sole provider to joint commissioner

All organisations entering a partnership implicitly agree to share their resources to some degree. Or at least allow their own resources to be constrained by the need to accommodate and align with the work of other partners. The governance structures for managing resources internally to one organisation may conflict with the more flexible ways of working demanded within partnerships.

Further, partnership should lead to new ways of working where outcomes are commissioned from others rather than delivered directly. These innovations are

potentially beneficial, but the process of change is difficult when it may mean putting the interests of partners ahead of your own community, staff or organisation.

3.11 Reality Check: Costs and benefits

Finding ways to assess the effectiveness of your commitment to a partnership is not easy. Aligning different practices in internal management, adjusting for different service boundaries and different delivery timescales to achieve consistency in reporting is time consuming and that means it is expensive.

Assessing the more intangible outcomes of collaboration through measuring qualitative improvements is by its nature quite subjective and requires honest self reflection. Where social and environmental outcomes are as important as financial value or economic results, governance structures need to exist that are able to receive qualitative information and make use of it.

3.12 Reality Check: Process versus product

It is important to differentiate between one off and more permanent engagement. Very often those being engaged are contributing towards an internal need to produce a result in a specific way or against a specific deadline. You may, perhaps when planning a service or dealing with an unexpected issue or conflict, want to only engage over a short period and with many people. However, once becoming engaged participants can resent losing that influence and the sense of fulfilment from believing that they were making a difference.

Alternatively you may wish to put in place neighbourhood arrangements such as community boards, or community commissioning structures that require a regular ongoing commitment that only a few committed activists can make. They can rightly come to resent later being labelled 'the same old faces' or 'unrepresentative'.

This might be simplified to "many for a short while, or fewer for longer". In either case creating mutual trust is essential to enable effective engagement and receive honest feedback, and trust is built primarily through the actions you take, not views you express.

How you approach the process of engaging is as important as what you want to achieve through doing it. You are more likely to ignore the comments you don't want but need to hear if you doubt your engagement process is robust. You are unlikely to attract quality participation unless participants feel they have the chance of making a difference.

In short, when reviewing an engagement or partnership process you need to ask:

- Are our meetings participatory, enjoyable, and effective?
- Do participants understand the rules of the engagement and accept its limits?
- Do participants gain something from engaging with us?
- And if not, why would they come back for more

4 An international perspective on good practice

4.1 Community engagement in the USA

The USA has a very different history to the UK, and different structures for local governance. Power has traditionally been de-centralised, and city administrations have retained considerable autonomy. This means the rhetoric of engagement is different. A more common term used in the US would be democratic governance, which carries a strong message that engagement practice is internalised rather than kept at arms length.

The National League of Cities (NLC) is one of the largest organisation connecting local councils in the USA. In promoting good practice, the NLC has issued a briefing on community engagement, giving a range of examples of imaginative engagement work. As the briefing states

“Many municipal leaders have put new emphasis on mobilizing citizens in order to make decisions, overcome conflicts, and solve critical public problems. These efforts are producing governance arrangements that are more participatory, deliberative and collaborative and that solve problems or make the most of opportunities.”

The NLC has produced a couple of useful publications referred to in the briefing

- "The Rise of Democratic Governance: How local leaders are reshaping politics for the 21st Century" (2004).
- "Building Democratic Governance: Tools and Structures for Engaging Citizens" (2005).

(See http://www.nlc.org/topics/index.aspx?SectionID=governance_structure)

Both documents stress the importance of governance structures, and echo of the way organisations such as the Audit Commission, IDEA and the Healthcare Commission in the UK promotes concept of good governance.

“Building Democratic Governance” raises some pointers for public officials to assess gaps in democratic governance strategy:

- *Ensuring that citizens are informed and connected, and helping them understand their public responsibilities;*
- *Resolving conflicts and bridging divisions in the community;*
- *Involving citizens in important policy decisions, or in the development of a plan;*
- *Generating new solutions to community problems, and encouraging citizens and citizen groups to help implement action efforts;*
- *Forging working relationships between citizens, public officials, and public employees;*
- *Involving new people who haven't been active in the community before; and*
- *Providing leadership skills and connections for all kinds of people.*

Further on the report goes on to differentiate between short term and permanent governance arrangements. Neither are preferred and both have value, but in relation to bodies such as LDLSP, which aims to become an effective partnership :

“[When] forging working relationships between citizens, public officials, and public employees: permanent efforts [are] usually more effective.”

The report stresses the importance of building a sense of shared ownership, of finding a compelling message to communicate, of understanding community networks through community mapping, of working with local media and using the internet effectively.

National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation, a member organisation focussing on deliberative engagement is another useful US information network. They share many resources through their well structured website.

See (<http://www.thataway.org/exchange>) and

The Institute for Local Government Collaborative Governance Unit report “Beyond the Usuals: Ideas To Encourage Broader Public Participation in Your Community” provides an overview of ideas that can assist in making civic engagement efforts more inclusive and representative of a community. Their key recommendations when undertaking engagement work are:

“Build long term capacity, get help, develop relationships, communicate effectively and respectfully, be flexible, have specific goals, follow up, say thank you, and finally build it in – (don't think of public involvement and civic engagement as a "stand alone" strategy).”

See (<http://www.thataway.org/exchange/resources.php?action=view&rid=2897>)

The Asset-Based Community Development Institute believes that community assets are key building blocks in sustainable urban and rural community revitalization efforts. These community assets include:

- *the skills of local residents*
- *the power of local associations*
- *the resources of public, private and non-profit institutions*
- *the physical and economic resources of local places.*

The ABCDI website contains numerous papers and links related to strengthening community assets through engagement practice.

(see <http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/abcd/>)

The Co-Intelligence Institute (CII) promotes awareness of co-intelligence and of the existing tools and ideas that can be used to increase it. Based on a model of social power, individuals influence is related to their ability to resist or influence the actions of others. The site argues for deliberative engagement. It makes the point that

“Good leadership is not a matter of getting everyone to follow you. Good leadership is helping the group or community make the best out of each individual's contribution. A good leader organizes or catalyzes a partnership of thought and action that cultivates and harvests each member's unique contribution.”

(see http://www.co-intelligence.org/CIPol_CommWisdom.html).

4.2 Community engagement in Australia and New Zealand

The Brisbane Declaration was an outcome of The 2005 International Conference on Engaging Communities, an initiative of the United Nations and the Government of the State of Queensland, Australia. Numerous articles and abstracts are still on the conference website at <http://www.engagingcommunities2005.org/abstracts.html> .

The Brisbane declaration contains these core principles of community engagement:

- *Integrity – when there is openness and honesty about the scope and purpose of engagement;*
- *Inclusion - when there is an opportunity for a diverse range of values and perspectives to be freely and fairly expressed and heard;*
- *Deliberation – when there is sufficient and credible information for dialogue, choice and decisions, and when there is space to weigh options, develop common understandings and to appreciate respective roles and responsibilities;*
- *Influence – when people have input in designing how they participate, when policies and services reflect their involvement and when their impact is apparent.*

(see http://www.thataway.org/exchange/files/docs/brisbane_declaration.pdf)

The “International Association for Public Participation Australasia” (IAP2) is the leading body for public participation in Australasia (and heavily involved in the conference mentioned above). It is a member organisation supported by regional local authorities. (see <http://www.iap2.org.au/>)

IAP2 follows an adapted Arnstein model (as does most nationally endorsed engagement policy worldwide). Its spectrum of engagement is similar to CLG and other UK bodies promoting good practice. The IAP2 Spectrum is

“Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower,”

IAP2 has also developed its own **Core Values for Public Participation**:

- *The public should have a say in decisions about actions that could affect their lives.*
- *Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.*
- *Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.*
- *Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.*
- *Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.*
- *Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.*
- *Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.*

(From the IAP2 website reference above)

In 2008 IAP2 awards recognised the efforts of three Australian Local Authorities for engagement work that met these core values. The awards were for:

- **Airey's Inlet Citizens' Jury:** Stratified random sampling to tap into “beyond the usual suspects”.

- **Sustainable Sydney 2030:** Ensuring all stakeholders were sought out, including the “often engaged”, “sometimes engaged” and the “seldom engaged”. Phone method for young people, with used their preferred methods of engagement.
- **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities:** Communications Strategy 2008-2010, Maribyrnong City Council: robust, well-thought out framework engaging diverse groups from different cultural backgrounds. It had an inclusive development process, with everyone involved in coming up with a good community engagement strategy.

(From IAP2 website)

Christchurch Council in New Zealand historically has also been recognised for their comprehensive area based engagement practice. Focussing on community boards and underpinned by strong “Community Policy and Community Policy Guidelines”. These guidelines state from the outset:

“The Community Policy Guidelines elaborate on processes rather than identifying specific outputs and programmes.”

Like USA models described in earlier it also stresses the importance of community governance. A concept that

“recognises that ‘ownership’ of ‘issues’ rest with the community as a whole”.

Further that “

Government’s role in community governance is only justified if it is close to and empowers communities and their citizens.”

(See: <http://www.ccc.govt.nz/Publications/CommunityPolicy/CDPolicyAndGuidelines.pdf>)

This is better described in an associated paper entitled “Taking The Canterbury Communities Into The New Millennium”, which outlined 6 principles for community governance. Ultimately derived from a UK academic sources at the University of Birmingham:

- *"Principle 1: The concern of the local authority extends beyond the services provided to the overall welfare of the area.*
- *Principle 2: The Local authority's role in community governance is only justified if it is close to and empowers the communities within and the citizens that constitute them.*
- *Principle 3: The local authority must recognise the contribution of other organisations – public, private and voluntary – and see its task as enabling (not controlling) that contribution.*
- *Principle 4: The local authority should ensure that the whole range of resources in a community is used to the full for the good of its area.*
- *Principle 5: To make the best use of those resources the local authority will need to rigorously review how needs are best met and to be prepared to act in many different ways.*
- *Principle 6: In showing leadership the local authority must seek to reconcile, to balance and, in the final resort, to judge the diversity of views and interests.*

*Underlying the principles and approach to community governance is a common theme. **Power needs to be exercised as close as possible to citizens and local communities.***

(May 1999 by Mike Richardson, and other Canterbury local authority CEOs. Available from Christchurch Council website)

4.3 Community Health Engagement in Canada

The Association of Ontario Health Centres (AOHC) is the policy and advocacy organization for non-profit, community-governed, primary health care organizations in Ontario, Canada. In 2006 AOHC produced a report: “A Review of the Trends and Benefits of Community Engagement and Local Community Governance in Health Care.”

This report echoes others in basing community engagement theory on the ladder of participation, with a strong emphasis on progression up the ladder. Community engagement is recognised to produce tailored and innovative solutions that can better tackle entrenched health inequalities.

For the purposes of this paper, community engagement [is] defined as a process, involving citizens at various levels of participation based on interpersonal communication and trust, and a common understanding and purpose.

Community governance [is] defined as a method of community engagement that ensures effective involvement and empowerment of local community representatives in the planning, direction setting and monitoring of health organizations to meet the health needs and priorities of the populations within local neighbourhood communities.

Within the document lies this challenging statement:

Across Canada, there has been a general shift in how public participation in health care is being carried out.

Community governance has been shifting away from direct democracy of locally elected community boards toward engagement through various other mechanisms such as information sharing and consultation, and by the establishment of community advisory committees, councils or groups...

locally governed community health organizations and individual community members see these trends as a movement towards more remote and centralized governance. Although community engagement is being promoted as a means to involve citizens in health care planning, empowerment of local citizens (including the most vulnerable populations) achieved through local community governance may be declining.

See <http://www.aohc.org/>

This shows also the danger of pressure from external pressure or institutional need, that may prefer consultation and information giving to true engagement, and so become part of the problem. Even when having good intentions, simply by the way we engage we can inadvertently be disempowering communities.

4.4 Learning from community empowerment around the world

As may be seen from the above examples there are common themes, but different approaches to engagement. Reviewing worldwide experiences are challenging as there is such huge diversity of context, and also barriers of language and culture. Many different systems of government to own our 'western style representative democracy' mean relevant models are limited to a relatively few established and committed democracies.

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is however one good example however of how learning can jump these barriers. An innovation in community empowerment developed principally in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre has been adopted by CLG.

Through the work of a relatively small NGO (the PB Unit), PB is now UK national policy and all local authorities are being asked to trial PB by 2012 as a route to greater community empowerment.

Lancaster District has its own first tentative experiment with PB in the Poulton Neighbourhood management area of Morecambe, through its 2008 'In your hands' programme.

(see <http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies>)

In order to examine the very complex picture of international experience, I will separate further discussion into three sections, relating to some common aims behind community engagement internationally:

- To improve democratic governance, service delivery and to reduce corruption.
- To strengthen the role of civil society institutions.
- To support those in need by empowering them and increasing their influence.

Improving democratic governance, efficiency and transparency.

Agencies such as the World Bank, the Department For International Development and the UN are increasing their requirements that government at a national and local level put in place reform and develop poverty reduction strategies (PRS) as a condition of aid, investment or debt relief. A PRS will likely include statements about how it will be guaranteed resources flow to the intended recipients, and why particularly programmes are needed. Impact assessments on the effect of development also increasingly demand that local stakeholders are able to influence how development occurs.

"Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) describe a country's macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programs to promote growth and reduce poverty, as well as associated external financing needs. PRSPs are prepared by governments through a participatory process involving civil society and development partners, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)."

(From World Bank website on PRSP's.)

PRSP's are supported by a range of initiatives to improve civil governance. See, for example, information on the World Bank Participation and Civic Engagement (P&CE) website concerning the "Community of Practice on Social Accountability (COPSA)".

COPSA is “a collaborative initiative that is being facilitated by the P&CE. It is intended to serve as a platform that brings together practitioners in the area of social accountability to exchange lessons and share experiences, and encourage synergy across sectors, departments, regions and organizations.”

- The Participation and Civic Engagement Group ... “promotes the participation of people and their organizations to influence institutions, policies and processes for equitable and sustainable development...”

P&CE talks of creating an Enabling Environment for Civic Engagement:

“A set of conditions - often inter-related - that impact on the capacity of citizens and civil society organizations to engage in development processes in a sustained and effective manner, whether at the policy, program or project level. They include legal, regulatory and policy frameworks, and political, socio-cultural and economic factors. These tools and methods share the following characteristics:

- *Participatory and inclusive*
- *Multi-stakeholder approaches*
- *Action-Research orientation*
- *Integrative (with other tools) and adaptive*
- *Outreach/collaboration with peers*
- *Focus on learning.”*

(See

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTPCENG/0..contentMDK:20282087~menuPK:1278110~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:410306,00.html>

Strengthening the role of civil society institutions

In the European Union there have been considerable efforts to strengthen civil society, particularly within the newest member states. The centralisation of power under communism created a vacuum in civil governance, with relatively weak institutions outside of the public sector. These institutions provide essential services in other countries and their absence creates opportunities for inappropriate and ineffective development.

Reports on Eastern Europe such as “We and they: ‘NGOs’ Influence on Decision-Making Processes in the Visegrad Group Countries” state

“Much room remains for positive contributions by the non-profit sector, such as in policy formulation and service delivery in particular areas. On the other hand, non-profit organizations in these countries are having trouble finding a clear role to play, and are facing many enormous challenges such as the withdrawal of [funding] and rising demands for professionalism and accountability.”

(see http://www.ceetrust.org/media/upload/brozura_anglicka_fin.pdf)

Themes that are frequently echoed in the language of the UK based VCFS bodies who, through partnerships, are being engaged by public bodies whilst seeing their core funding being replaced by contracts and therefore demands for greater professionalism. As local governance modernises, so the established relations with external stakeholder bodies and local communities need to be re-structured. That can only happen through the exchange of knowledge and values between the sectors.

As the European Union enlarges and takes over the responsibilities of traditional nation states it becomes perhaps more necessary to redefine how local communities

engage with its regulations and with each other. This was reflected in recent campaigns, directed at the ill fated European constitution, for participatory engagement methods such as participatory budgeting to be used to give voice to migrant or immigrant communities, who are denied influence through traditional state based representative democracy.

Growing environmental concerns and issues of land use, economic development and local sustainability have also created new pressures and the need for better ways of ensuring engagement. Highlighted by campaigns against controversial developments or planning issues such as the Heathrow third runway, the Manchester congestion charge, the 'siting' of travellers, or large hydro-electric schemes in other countries).

Planning regulations worldwide increasingly demand that communities of interest and geography play their part in the system of regulation. In the UK area masterplans and Local Development Frameworks are now statutory requirement of local authorities, requiring the adoption of coherent and comprehensive engagement processes. Regional and district masterplans are being increasingly complimented by smaller scale, though non statutory, parish and neighbourhood planning as is already seen in Lancaster District.

(See, for example: <http://www.southend.gov.uk/content.asp?content=10770>) and http://www.devonrcc.org.uk/page/parish_plans.php)

Supporting those in need by empowering them and increasing their influence.

International Development is now a highly complex system for encouraging equality and wealth creation in the poorest nations. Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as OXFAM, Plan International, Save the Children and CAFOD have led the way in innovations in community development, and can have a big influence both overseas and on UK policy.

Though it has been noted, with some irony, that the demands for overseas social accountability by the Department for international Development (DFID) is often stronger than comparative civil society policy at home. Perhaps it is the case that technical experts within UK local government are better at their job than overseas experts, so there is less need for community engagement, which may explain this particular policy gap.

Action research techniques such as participatory appraisal and community mapping promoted by international NGOs can allow communities to define their own development. Building social capital is seen as crucial, as is identifying where investment would be most effective. Micro-finance schemes for example are often based on working with women's organisations, as women re-invest money in the local economy more effectively than men.

Children are becoming powerful advocates at climate control conferences, supported by NGO's, who understand they can carry more influence in the media than politicians and professionals. Public education programmes and targeting interventions towards 'hard to reach' communities go hand in hand with the building of strong, sustainable, independent local communities. This has echoes in current UK Youth policy aimed at giving young people a voice and a say. Community development and social equality are seemingly inseparable.

Voices of the Poor

In his paper "Towards Participatory Local Governance", John Gaventa, of the Institute of Development Studies, quotes from the Voices of the Poor report,

"many poor people around the globe perceive large institutions ... to be distant, unaccountable and corrupt...Drawing from participatory research exercises in 23 countries....from the perspectives of poor people world wide, there is a crisis in governance.

While the range of institutions that play important roles in poor people's lives is vast, poor people are excluded from participation in governance.

State institutions, whether represented by central ministries or local government are often neither responsive nor accountable to the poor; rather the reports details the arrogance and disdain with which poor people are treated."

(see

http://www2.ids.ac.uk/logolink/resources/downloads/Towards%20Participatory%20Governance_Currents_.pdf)

Logolink, to which John Gaventa is a frequent contributor, is a comprehensive resource site on community engagement and international good practice. LogoLink receives its core funding and support from the Ford Foundation. The LogoLink Coordination Unit is based within the Participation Group at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK.

(see <http://www2.ids.ac.uk/logolink/resources/index.htm>)

4.5 Democratic engagement as a route to wealth and equality

The public sector contributes much to the wealth of a community, especially those at risk of missing out on the opportunities of others. How local authorities engage has significant impacts on the strength of civil society, the way resources are shared, and the quality of social capital that exists within a community.

Community engagement has many hard to quantify benefits such as; self confidence, prevention of isolation, reduction in risk, duplication and wasted resources, improved quality of life, environmental protection and self responsibility, increased voluntary action, social enterprise activity, educational and learning opportunities, community cohesion and active citizenship -- to name a few. Feeling empowered to be able to influence those around you has benefits for the individual and society as a whole.

Poor engagement leads to entrenched inequality, reinforces discrimination felt in other areas of life, undermines the role and influence of local government, and contributes towards our democratic deficit.

Good engagement comes with good leadership and good governance. Strategic leadership is about making sure there are routes for information to be exchanged about what works and what is being done. That there are core values that all are expected to follow, and that managers and directors must take engagement seriously, and will be held to account if they don't.

Learning from overseas experience of engagement.

It has been stated earlier how innovations and ideas for engagement often arise overseas often gained from working at the grassroots within communities having few resources. Logolink and its contributors are but one example of this.

The Community Planning Handbook, a hugely useful guide to a range of participatory techniques, many developed initially overseas, is a good example of this transfer of knowledge in action. And it comes with an endorsement of the highest authority:

"The brilliant website [communityplanning.net](http://www.communityplanning.net) sets out clear advice on a whole range of ways you can get people involved - using everything from models, to photos, to computer maps to show what development could look like."

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP,

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, 25 March 2008

(see <http://www.communityplanning.net/>)

4.6 Closing thoughts on learning from overseas

Engagement is a process

The consistent theme running through all the above examples from the USA to Australasia is that engagement is not static. That engagement should be a developmental process. Civic leadership with influence (such as the LDLSP and its members) should see its role as developmental and educative, and as an enabler of others activity.

Engagement is a developmental process

Therefore, when using the concept of the 'ladder of participation', or the 'spectrum of engagement' it is not enough to design a process or framework with addresses activity at any specific level. It must also enable progression up the ladder, so that isolated and disempowered individuals become empowered through the process of participating, and those without social power can acquire it.

Learning to do engagement better will have costs and take time

There will of course be many ways by which techniques and knowledge can be transferred from one context to another. Learning what works takes time and energy and needs resources and commitment. It also needs a process of learning and reflection

- First you need openness about the need to change, a responsive approach to learning and self improvement and a wide appreciation of the possible benefits.
- The second challenge will be the commitment of resources for trying new ideas.
- Thirdly you need to acting on that commitment and also allow the time for longer term outcomes to show through.
- Finally you need to evaluate with all the stakeholders why you did it, how you did it, what worked, and what to do next.

5 UK and local policy and practice

5.1 Communities and Local Government

The Department Of Communities And Local Government (CLG) is leading on community engagement reforms, with the release of a series of policy papers over the last few years, with new expectations on local government from April 2009, such as the 'Duty to Involve'.

The impetus to change the relationship between central and local government and local government with communities seriously began with the Lyon's Inquiry into Local Government, which was commissioned by central government in 2005. This led to the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, which received royal assent in the latter part of 2007. Central government would allow greater flexibility over budgets and reduce the requirements around performance management information if local government would really demonstrate its commitment by becoming strategic local leaders and passing some of the power to communities. Best Value Performance Indicators would be completely removed (there were in excess of 2000 indicators that local government had to report to central government on) and replaced with 198 National Indicators. The concept of Best Value does, however, still remain.

Local Strategic Partnerships have been a voluntary option for local government for at least 10 years. However, since the introduction of the Local Government Act in 2007, they have become a mandatory requirement.

- LSPs are the strategic leadership mechanism for local authority areas.
- Local authorities are now required to lead LSPs in their strategic leadership and place-shaping role.
- LSPs are required to have a Sustainable Community Strategy, which sets out the 10 year vision and aims for the local area.
- SCS are required to be agreed in conjunction with the community. LSPs are then required to develop three-year action plans to implement the vision and aims of the SCS.
- These action plans are called Local Area Agreements. LSPs are required to manage and monitor the SCS and LAA and ensure that outcomes are being achieved.
- It is, ultimately, the LSPs responsibility to ensure the delivery of the LAA.
- The local authority is then accountable to central government (specifically the Audit Commission through the CAA).

Local Area Agreements are the 3-year delivery plans for the SCS. They set out in more detail how the visions and aims of the SCS will be achieved, and the targets upon which successful achievement of those aims is measured. The main challenges with setting LAAs currently are:

- The conflict between using them as an opportunity to 'place-shape' through the inclusion of local indicators vs. concern that LSPs will be assessed on the LAAs and so may be scared to be too adventurous (so they become a performance framework rather than a tool to shape an area).
- Not knowing at what level to set targets because the National Indicators (NIs) are new and no one knows what a realistic/achievable/stretch target might be.
- How to agree pooled budgets between partners to jointly deliver the NIs.

(Source: Participatory Budgeting Unit Internal report Feb 08)

The effect of these changes have been felt locally too. Some of the LAA national indicators are related to community engagement, such as NI 4 (% of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality). This indicator, and a number of others related to issues of community appear in the LCC corporate plan 2008/9 under the heading:

“Ensure that local communities have more influence and involvement in the way services are delivered and decisions that affect them are made”.

This goes on to state:

“We are ambitious for our communities and believe local people should be at the forefront of decision making and we are committed to enabling local people to play a fuller role in shaping their communities.... This is a high priority for the Council. [In order to] Increase the Council’s responsiveness to local concerns by improving consultation and communication procedures [the council has adopted these] Key Performance Indicators (amongst others): NI 3 – civic participation in the local area. NI 4 – percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality. NI 5 – overall / general satisfaction with local area. NI 6 – participation in regular volunteering.”

One significant way these indicators may be measured will be the **2008 Place Survey**, which has superseded the national citizenship survey, and is due to report soon. A national table of results by local authority will be released on 9 March 2009 with the results used as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment return in Autumn 2009.

CLG has continued the reform with the July 2008 white paper “Communities in Control: real people, real power”:

“Communities in control tells the story of power, influence and control and how people can use existing and new tools to access it. The White Paper looks at who has power, on whose behalf is it exercised, how is it held to account, and how can it be accessed by everyone in local communities.”

See (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitiesincontrol>)

Key propositions of the white paper include:

- A duty to promote democracy,
- measures to improve involvement of police and health authorities,
- increased visibility and accountability,
- petitions to have greater force,
- access to data,
- a major role for the third sector, and initiatives such as participatory budgeting, asset transfer,
- more avenues of redress and workforce reforms.

Areas requiring legislation are within the Community Empowerment Bill, part of the 2008/9 legislative cycle.

(see <http://www.commonleader.gov.uk/output/Page2452.asp>)

Other significant CLG publications in this area is the 2007 “Action Plan for Community

Empowerment: Building on success”, which gives specific ideas for empowering citizens. see (<http://www.takepart.org/assets/documents/communities-action-plan>) and the 2007 Sustainable Communities Act (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/sustainablecommunitiesact>)

5.2 Police

The website Community Engagement in Policing outlines current best practice.

“Formed in late 2003, the National Practitioner Panel for Community Engagement in Policing brings together a core group of 16 policing practitioners with relevant skills, experience and expertise in the community engagement field. The aim of the group is to identify and collate effective practice information and make it available to other practitioners to enable them to carry out their community engagement remit more effectively. The result of their work – the Guide to Community Engagement, supported by a database of effective practice - will be available on this site”.
(<http://www.communityengagement.police.uk/>)

UK Policing policy also use the ladder of participation as a key model of community engagement and states

“A wide definition of community engagement would include consultation, social and marketing research, and community and stakeholder engagement. “
(see mapping Community Engagement Activities on the above site)

Following on has been the development of some practical tools around policing and community engagement, housed in the Community Engagement in Policing website at: <http://www.communityengagement.police.uk/workspace/guide>. This includes useful questions for organisations to ask when embedding engagement:

“Introducing community engagement into an organisation presents a number of challenges to traditional ways of working and the existing culture. Successful community engagement often introduces a different decision-making culture into an organisation. In other words, community engagement needs to be 'mainstreamed'. Structures and processes that are often closed and inward focused need to open and face outwards to the wider community. This means that policy makers need to be more open, transparent and inclusive in how they work. To adapt to this different way of working, organisations need to think about the following:

- *Are staff aware of the organisation's commitment to community engagement?*
- *Do staff understand how community engagement relates to their own area of work?*
- *How is community engagement promoted across the organisation?*
- *How is community engagement policy stitched into the core business of the organisation e.g. is it reflected in the main strategic documents?*
- *What does the organisation hope to achieve through mainstreaming community engagement?”*

Police engagement practice is underpinned by the original Policing white paper 2004 “Building Communities, Beating Crime: A better police service for the 21st century”, and the Flanagan Review 2008, which recommended:

“[That] partnership working between the police and local and central government is properly integrated into mainstream policing and that the police are fully equipped to work effectively in partnership to enable them to deliver strong public protection. The successful implementation of neighbourhood policing should be used as an example of this kind of practice.

Strengthening [the] accountability of the police at a local level so that the public’s views are heard and their police service is responsive to their needs.”

(see <http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/police-reform/flanagan-police-review>)

In our local area, as in others, the Police have a history of good practice in community engagement, not least due to the importance of good two way communication, local intelligence and trust in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour. However it is perhaps less clear how this good practice moves from neighbourhood operation to accountability and informing at more strategic levels.

The Policing and Crime Bill, announced on 18 December 2008, dropped earlier proposals for directly elected crime and policing representatives (CPRs). The bill aims to increase effectiveness and public accountability of policing. The Local Government Association supported...

“the core principles behind the Bill of empowering local people by giving them a stronger voice in police decision-making, ...but was concerned that the bill would propose the reform of police authorities by replacing councillors with directly-elected CPRs.

The government has removed the provisions from the bill relating to the introduction of CPRs, and will be looking to bring in a statutory duty on police authorities to have regard to the views of people in their area about policing, and allows HM Inspectorate of Constabulary to assess police authorities’ performance against this duty.”

Source: LGA briefing: <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/1318194>

5.3 Health

'Reaching out – community engagement and health' is a recent publication from the IDeA's Healthy Communities programme, written in conjunction with NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). The document explores the importance of engaging communities in health promotion and health services, and of the health benefits that this can bring. It builds on earlier NICE guidance on community engagement and health published earlier this year. It reflects recent government commitments to engaging the public further in democratic and decision-making processes, outlined in the Community Empowerment White Paper, 'Communities in Control'. The publication is

“designed to stimulate thinking about community engagement within any council. It is particular relevant to those working in patient and public involvement. It should also interest community development officers, lead members for health and public health workers.”

Source: <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=8681030>

In February 2008 NICE produced guidance aimed to support those working with and involving communities in decisions on health improvement that affect them. It is for people working in the NHS and other sectors who have a direct or indirect role in - and

responsibility for - community engagement. This includes those working in local authorities and the community, voluntary and private sectors.

Source: <http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/index.jsp?action=byID&o=11929>

Within Lancashire, "Lancashire LINK" is the short name for Lancashire's new Local Involvement Network...

The Lancashire LINK is currently run by an Interim Board. Between December 2008 and March 2009 we will be exploring your views because we want to make sure that the LINK is run in line with what you think. We think that there could be two main ways of structuring the Board:

- 1. There could be a small strategic group who oversees LINK work. The main job of the LINK would be to help people give their own views – to let people know how, when and who to contact. The LINK would take action if it felt people's views were not being properly considered by the powers that be. (Supportive Model)*
- 2. The LINK Board could be made up of representatives of the major local charities and voluntary organisations. They would stand up for the issues that they decide are important to local people. (Representative Model)*

The LINK is offering different ways for people to be involved, such as online or as survey respondents as well as joining the Links board. Lancashire LINK is based in Leyland and has two outreach workers located for the North Lancashire district. (From "How do you want your LINK to run?" consultation document on the County website.

see also (<http://www.lancashirelink.org.uk>)

North Lancashire NHS offered these references to their approach to community engagement, as part of their submission to the survey of community engagement associated with this report.

[We are] Developing a model to enhance the capacity of statutory organisations to engage with lay communities. Pickin C, Popay J, Staley K, Bruce N, Jones C, Gowman N. Salford and Trafford Health Authority, Eccles, UK.

This research aims to understand the processes that constrain the capacity of statutory organisations to work effectively with lay communities and to develop a model to enhance their capacity to do so. The research consisted of three elements: a review of relevant literature; in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of people who had recently been involved in community-statutory sector partnership; and a deliberative workshop involving ten expert witnesses, selected to reflect a range of sectors and levels within organisations. Many factors contribute to a lack of effective strategic partnerships between lay communities and statutory organisations. These factors fall into five domains:

- the community's capacity to engage;*
- the skills and competencies of organisational staff;*
- the dominant professional service culture;*
- the overall organisational ethos and culture; and*
- the dynamics of the local and national political systems.*

Summary comments on changes in the Health Sector

There are of course a number of local NHS providers alongside the North Lancashire PCT, such as the University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Trust and the Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust. There are a number of other multi-agency health and social care partnerships in operation alongside the LDLSP.

These are all likely to be developing their own LINKs or other engagement structures. Analysis of all of these initiatives and how they relate to the LDLSP has proved beyond the scope of this research and needs further mapping and understanding.

What is clear is a multiplicity of health and social care agencies seeking to engage in different ways within the District has potential for some confusion about the best way to engage. This is an historic institutional and structural problem with, for example limited correlation of service boundaries (known as co-terminosity) and confused or shifting responsibilities overlaid by national and regional influences.

This needs monitoring, as it risks diluting partnership and engagement opportunities. The pace of modernisation and change inevitably works against the coordination of effort. The LDLSP will have a role through its framework in trying to reduce the engagement burden or 'consultation fatigue' often cited as a burden on the VCFS. It should also save resources if successful in reducing duplication.

Within the health economy there are likely to be pockets of extreme need where better engagement is hugely important. Anecdotal evidence suggests that young people's mental health services in the district have been inadequate for many years. Tackling the hidden epidemic of mental health problems among young people depends on children and their families having a stronger voice. That voice comes through engagement work.

It may be noted more generally that empowerment of the individual is essential to:

- prevent ill health,
- close the wide gap in life expectancy between rich and poor
- support those with long lasting and disabling (chronic) illness.

It is noted in the UK that preventative health spending is probably under 5% of the total health service budget. Community engagement is recognised to produce tailored and innovative solutions that can often tackle entrenched health inequalities better than the historical top down culture for delivering health services.

It can also reduce the isolation of individuals by facilitating the formation of 'patient experts' networks and service user groups. Community engagement creates communities, and communities care for their members.

5.4 Children, Schools and Families

"The Children Act 2004 provides the legal underpinning for the transformation of children's services as set out in the Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme. Section 10 of the Act provides the statutory basis for Children's Trusts (the duty to cooperate).

Revised Children's Trust guidance on the 'duty to cooperate' was published on 18 November 2008. The relevant partners are placed under a 'duty to cooperate in the

making of arrangements to improve well-being' and have a power to pool budgets and share other resources."

Source: <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/guidance/>

Following on from the Children Act, the Childrens Plan December 2007 outlines how the lives of young people can be improved. One of its 5 core principles is that:

"services need to be shaped by and responsive to children, young people and families, not designed around professional boundaries"

http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan/downloads/The_Childrens_Plan.pdf

Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities, published in July 2007 sets out a series of reforms based around three themes: empowerment, access and quality. The Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities Implementation Plan was published in March 2008.

"The commitment in Aiming High for Young People to increase young people's direct influence over resources is referred to as 'budget devolution.' This commitment is to reward the decision making ability young people have made so far through the Youth Opportunity Fund and the Youth Capital Fund."

Source (<http://www.nya.org.uk/information/100131/100564/108863/aiminghigh/>)

A review of budget devolution and young people in July 2008 outlined the barriers to budget devolution and the three top factors were:

- *A lack of resources to support young people properly,*
- *The attitudes of staff in departments not focusing on young people*
- *Finance and other systems being too inflexible or complicated.*

Source: (http://www.nya.org.uk/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=116030)

These findings echo those within the health world (see section 5.3), specifically the North Lancashire PCT definitions of engagement.

Involving young people in areas outside of core youth spending is both problematic and also potentially rewarding. Mechanisms such as participatory budgeting offer one solution, as young people can actively and equally participate alongside adults. (see Poulton neighbourhood management DVD "In your hands."

<http://www.poultontimes.co.uk/poulton-video>).

It has also been noted in other participatory budgeting programmes that young people often choose to spend devolved money in areas that benefit the whole community, such as parks, festivals and libraries.

Schools offer another arena to develop engagement work. Engagement, if it is to become a lifetime habit, best begins young, such as the recent 'democracy week' events in Lancaster (see <http://lancaster.gov.uk/PressRelease.asp?id=SX9452-A7802820>).

Further the national curriculum at KS3/4 stresses the importance of citizenship education, with practical ways for young people to engage, both in the classroom, through school councils and through the community. Schools also present an excellent

opportunity to engage with parents and carers. Empowerment is both individually realised through increased personal opportunity, and also by the greater opportunities made available within your community.

5.5 Young People and engagement locally

Lancashire Children's and Young People's Charter. October 2008 states

1. *Children and young people should have the right to be continuously involved in consultation and development of the work from start to finish.*
2. *A sufficient amount of money should be put aside specifically for consultation and involvement of children and young people, whilst also ensuring that there is enough money available for other services.*
3. *Adults should take into account what children & young people want, not just ask us and then ignore our ideas.*
4. *Children and young people should have feedback on what they have said and what is going to be done next.*
5. *Have a variety of ways to involve children and young people, such as questionnaires, discussions, websites, arts activities or texting.*
6. *Children and young people need to be consulted about subjects and issues which they are experienced and interested in.*
7. *Consultation work should be straightforward and explained clearly to the children and young people involved.*

Before you begin a process of involving young people in decision making, you should be able to tick each box to show you have considered each point:

- *Clear about the boundaries and the level of consultation?*
- *Clear about the process; Why you are consulting us? What will happen as a result?*
- *How will you feedback to us? How long will the whole process take?*
- *Putting your money where your mouth is! If there is a budget implication have you considered this and got approval?*
- *Going to make the experience interesting, educative, and fun?*
- *Going to use a variety of methods, models, and materials which are appropriate to the group?*
- *Involving us at every stage of the process, especially in the early stages when the consultation is being shaped.*
- *Taking into account our ability levels, cultural backgrounds, and individual personal circumstances?*
- *Planning to formally recognise in some way the contributions we make, e.g. a certificate of participation or achievement which means something to us?*
- *Keeping in mind that whatever you are planning should always benefit us?*
- *Certain that we will understand the language you are using?*
- *Sure that you're involving everyone, regardless of age, gender, race, sexuality, disability etc, and will treat everyone equally?*
- *Giving us plenty of time to get involved in your event or consultation?*

(see

http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/enewsviewer/index.asp?id=2008/10/13/47251&news=669&page=pr&_)

Lancaster District Children's Trust, produced a report entitled "Engagement of children & young people" in September 2008. This describes current engagement activity and a recent October 2008 meeting between young people and elected

councillors in the district, to form the basis of the Council's Youth Engagement Strategy (YES). This type of meeting is expected to be a regular experience in future.

Some challenges were identified in the report including:

"It is suggested that there is some work carried out on developing a shared definition of 'engagement' and raise awareness and understanding on the different levels of 'participation', perhaps by using an adaptation of Hart's 'Ladder of Participation'.

It is really only with the emergence of Children's Trusts that we are finding out that colleagues from different sectors/services don't share the same understanding of words that we all use, many interchangeably. Clarity is definitely needed before we can go on to the next stages.....

The best strategy is to develop as wide a range of opportunities for young people's engagement. There is no 'one size fits all' programme or project. What has worked really well in one community/area will not necessarily work as well with a different group of young people. Every community is unique and trying to replicate what has worked somewhere else isn't taking into account the needs, skills and experience of a different set of people.

It goes on to quote from City of Calgary 'A Guide to Youth Friendly Practices'

'.....we should view youth not as recipients of services but as citizens becoming more actively engaged and involved in the processes that affect them. We are becoming increasingly aware that youth, given the opportunities, can do and be, so much more, not only to the benefit of youth themselves, but to society as a whole.

We must begin to systematically incorporate structures that not only acknowledge youth as full citizens with rights and responsibilities, but to provide opportunities for their active involvement beyond platitudes and tokenism...

youth want to be able to influence policy – not only in areas considered "youth issues" but also in areas that are broader in scope and are of general societal concern..'
(see <http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/calendar/view.asp?calevent=1040432>)

5.6 Involve – the participation organisation.

Involve is one of the best sources of good practice on engagement in the UK. Supported by CLG, the Department of Health and others, it uses its website to disseminate a range of valuable resources. It is a not for profit organisation that receives funding from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

Involve's website "People and Participation.net" (see www.peopleandparticipation.net) list extensive methods, case studies and research, and hosts forums for engagement practitioners.

Involve cites the model from the IAP2 referred to in the international research. The spectrum of participation: Inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower.
(<http://www.iap2.org/associations/4748/files/Spectrum.pdf>).

In a recent report in association with the National Consumer Council, Involve laid out nine principles of effective deliberative public engagement. They are that an effective process:

- *Makes a difference*
- *Is transparent*
- *Has integrity*
- *Is tailored to circumstances*
- *Involves the right number and type of people*
- *Treats participants with respect*
- *Gives priority to their discussions*
- *Is reviewed and evaluated to improve practice*
- *Participants are kept informed*

Source: www.involve.org.uk/assets/Publications/Deliberative-public-engagement-nine-principles.pdf

5.7 Improvement and Development Agency for local government

IDeA is owned by the Local Government Association and states on its website

“IDeA works for local government improvement so councils can serve people and places better. Our offer is built around the real issues for local people, focusing on partnership working, place-shaping and tackling cross-cutting issues.

We use experienced councillors and senior officers, known as peers, who support and challenge councils to improve themselves.

We enable councils to share good practice through the national Beacon Scheme and regional local government networks. The best ideas are put on this website.”

Source: (<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=1589600>)

IDeA’s website contains a section on community engagement with a range of case studies and links to useful information

(see <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=7816307>)

IDeA links engagement with community cohesion, and the cohesion section of their website

“gives an overview of how the cohesion agenda links in with the engagement and empowerment agendas. There has been a shift in the perceived role of councils and their partners...People want to be involved to different degrees in the way that public services are provided and what happens in their communities. It is important that public service providers are aware of this ‘spectrum of engagement’. They need to tailor support and provision along that spectrum.”

Source: (<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=8799371>)

5.8 Third Sector approaches

The third sector plays a crucial role in community engagement through their ability to be a bridge between statutory bodies and local communities, through a web of local associations and organisations. In particular VCFS organisations have been given a core role in local strategic partnerships. Therefore effective partnership working is an indicator of effective community engagement, and maybe an essential component of

community engagement. How the VCFS are engaged, and how that engagement is managed is crucial.

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) recently collaborated with the Local Government Association to produce in July 2008 a report “votes and voices: the complementary nature of representative and participative democracy”. This gave strong endorsement to maintaining the primacy of representative democracy, and clearly laid out that the VCFS does not ‘represent the community’. Rather, it is an enabler of community participation.

NAVCA is the national voice of local third sector infrastructure in England. Navca aims

“ to ensure communities are well served by the local third sector by supporting its members and their work with over 160,000 local groups and organisations. NAVCA believes that local voluntary and community action is vital for healthy and inclusive communities.

Source (<http://www.navca.org.uk/about/>)

Navca also hosts a partnership infobank that links community engagement with Local area agreements, and lays out the role the VCFS plays in the development of LAAs (<http://www.navca.org.uk/localvs/infobank/laa/practice/engagement/>)

Navca states:

“Community engagement is central to local area agreements. There are two principles behind this:

- *People should have as much control over their own lives as is reasonable and possible.*
- *Services that involve people and communities are more effective.*

For this reason, every LAA must include a statement of how local people and the VCS are involved in the design and delivery of their LAA. The statement of involvement is an important element of the final LAA document. It should reflect how the VCS and the wider community have been involved in the development of the LAA and how they will be involved in its implementation. The VCS should not only be involved in developing the practice that informs the LAA and its statement of involvement of the VCS but in signing off the final document. It might include:

- *how residents have been involved in identifying the local priorities for the LAA;*
- *how the voluntary and community sector were involved in the process of drawing up and negotiating the LAA;*
- *the scope of the VCS role in the final LAA;*
- *how the VCS will benefit from and contribute to the LAA outcomes;*
- *the links to the local strategy for community engagement and VCS involvement, including investment in capacity building, community development and VCS infrastructure;*
- *how the VCS will be involved in monitoring LAA activities*
- *how the VCS will be involved in the governance of the LAA.*

Government Office [in the North West] is responsible for overseeing this and reviewing it's progress every six months. More information is contained in the latest LAA Guidance.

Good examples of statements of involvement developed by VCS organisations:

- *Derbyshire's Local Area Agreement (pp. 6-8)*
- *Middlesbrough's Local Area Agreement (pp 23-27)*

Source (<http://www.navca.org.uk/localvs/infobank/laa/practice/engagement/>)

5.9 Neighbourhood engagement

The National Association for Neighbourhood Management (NANM) was formerly known as the National Neighbourhood Management Network.

“The network was set up in 2002 by Communities and Local Government... Neighbourhood management means residents working in partnership with mainstream service providers, the local authority, businesses and the voluntary and community sectors, to make local services more responsive to the needs of their area. It is a process which recognises the uniqueness of each place; allowing the people that live, work or provide services in it to build on its strengths and address its specific challenges.

Operating in a defined area and at a scale that people identify with, crucial to its success is the neighbourhood manager; advocate, mediator, facilitator, influencer and negotiator for positive change. It does not involve large amounts of money - rather using existing resources in a better way.”

Source: (<http://www.neighbourhoodmanagement.net/>)

In January 2009 CLG released the report “Guidance on building a local sense of belonging”. The report states

“A sense of belonging is not something you can manufacture – it has to be grown and engendered. So as with other cohesion work this is about long term multiple initiatives....Encouraging people to get involved in local democracy and decision making will give them a greater sense of ownership for their neighbourhood.”
Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power sets out how government is encouraging more empowerment.”

Neighbourhood management has been heavily promoted by CLG as central to the Place agenda, and as a way to modernise the delivery of services. A 2006 research report commissioned by CLG noted:

“The added value that Neighbourhood Managers and their partnerships most obviously and consistently bring is:

- *The identification and crystallisation of local problems into specific challenges, as seen from a ‘customer/resident’ viewpoint, together with the ability to raise them with service providers and prompt a faster response. In particular, this provides a drive for coherent solutions to ‘joined up problems’ as this is how residents experience them;*
- *Promoting networking, relationships and joint working between service providers at a local level, to bring about more holistic responses to local challenges;*
- *Improving the accessibility of services, particularly by promoting local/outreach delivery in the neighbourhood;*

- *Providing an environment in which innovation and pilot projects by service providers are encouraged and can be better delivered, with new working practices developed as a result;*
- *Bringing residents and service providers together to improve the sensitivity and responsiveness of local services to local needs; and*
- *Helping to strengthen the local community and voluntary sector....*

...Our research has demonstrated that neighbourhood management, as delivered by this programme, is capable of bringing mainstream services together and involving local

communities to deliver better outcomes for deprived areas.”

Source (www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/displaypagedoc.asp?id=1728)

Neighbourhood management is generally regarded as a good way of addressing the new duty to involve, and to play a part in community engagement good practice, as it enables participation at the level that most people identify with. Lancaster City Council has run a local Neighbourhood Management programme in Morecambe, and as part of that work LCC ran its first participatory budgeting pilot.

There have been indications that the council wishes to adopt NM more widely, but is perhaps struggling to identify the resources to do so. There was concern expressed locally in response to the CEF survey about the way support has been reduced for neighbourhood management in Morecambe and by implication concern that NM won't be continued as it is believed that there is no firm agreement on how it will operate or be funded.

Of course neighbourhood management, a solution to deprivation in primarily urban areas, works alongside other locality structures, most notably Parish Councils. There are many active local Parishes in the District, and many responded positively to the local survey of community engagement. Parishes sit at the foundations of local democracy and many are pushing for a greater role for parishes as engagement mechanisms. This all speaks strongly to the agenda of place and identity previously discussed.

5.10 Lancashire County Council engagement policy

Comments on the Council's engagement at Directorate level.

This section consists of reports taken directly from papers on the County Website. It was difficult to identify particular policy or process at County Directorate level around community engagement.

Despite the fact the review was done at a key moment in the adoption of the 2009 budget, it was noticeable for example that there was no opportunity to read about proposals or comment on the Council revenue budget via the County council website.

Though it should be noted that *“Lancashire County Council has, for the fourth year in a row, been awarded the top rating of 4 stars from the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)”*
(Source Lancaster District Budget Leaflet 2008/9).

From County Cabinet Papers May 2008:

“A Neighbourhood Engagement Framework for the County Council is presented for approval. An approach to neighbourhood engagement for the County Council has been in development since 2006. A draft neighbourhood engagement framework was produced as the basis for consultation. The message from consultees was that the approach needs to be more flexible to accommodate local differences. It was also clear that there is lots of activity already happening on neighbourhood engagement across Lancashire and that these should be embraced.

In parallel with the consultation, more detailed work was undertaken to improve our understanding of the implications or impact of Neighbourhood Engagement and to identify what would be critical to the successful implementation of our approach. This included:

- a series of expert opinion reports which had been commissioned to provide detailed information around key themes;*
- the Whitworth pilot about enhanced three tier working and devolution of services down to a neighbourhood level ; and*
- the LAA neighbourhood pilots in rural and urban areas.*

A number of LCC(county) services and external partners have already responded to the government’s agenda and have either developed or are in the process of developing engagement and empowerment strategies and activities. Most notably these include:

Neighbourhood Management across seven of the twelve districts of Lancashire - all managed differently

- Community Engagement strategy as part of the Wellbeing agenda – being developed by Adult and Community Services.*
- Statement of Community Involvement (as at Appendix B)*
- The legal requirement to engage across the six equality strands*
- Every Child Matters*
- The introduction of LINKS for Health and Social Care.*
- Neighbourhood Policing*
- Participatory budgeting – national pilot in Poulton Neighbourhood Management (Lancaster City Council)*

The Way Ahead

Rather than producing a definitive document, we are proposing to develop the Framework as a website. The site would develop around the definition, vision statement and corporate objectives for neighbourhood engagement which Cabinet is being asked to approve.

For each of these agreed objectives there would be a link to all relevant activity, policies, procedures and case studies. The site will then provide members and officers with all the information needed to effectively engage at a local level through whatever arrangements exist.

The County Council’s Statement of Involvement (as at Appendix B) has been produced, as a mapping of current County Council activity against the spectrum of means of neighbourhood engagement included in the original framework consultation. It is proposed that this will also form an element of the neighbourhood engagement website.

Consultations: During the development of the neighbourhood engagement, there has been extensive consultation with neighbourhood bodies and other partner organisations across Lancashire. We also held a series of parish road shows during Summer 2007, as part of which we received feedback on the draft Framework.”
 (see [Http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/council/meetings](http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/council/meetings))

Appendix B lays out a Statement of Community Involvement within a PowerPoint presentation (I could not find this elsewhere on the County website.) This states:

“Our model of community involvement is a spectrum.

The Lancashire County Council Spectrum of engagement

Inform	Research	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
<i>Providing quality information to support public understanding of council services and activities</i>	<i>Obtaining the views of the public on a range of open issues</i>	<i>Obtaining public feedback on proposals to inform decision-making</i>	<i>Working with the public to ensure issues and concerns are addressed</i>	<i>Working in partnership with the public in decision-making</i>	<i>Public decision making and/or devolved budgets leading to service commissioning</i>
Feedback					
<i>Providing an appropriate response to those who have shared their views and experiences</i>					

This is underpinned by the:

- *Communications Strategy*
- *Research and Consultation Strategy*
- *Customer Access Strategy*
- *Locality Focus Framework*
- *Neighbourhood Engagement Framework”*

See: <http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/council/meetings/displayFile.asp?FTYPE=A&FILEID=29926>

From the Environment directorate website:

“Participation and consultation are considered fundamental to local government in Lancashire. The County Council has established a panel of 1700 residents across the County who regularly complete surveys to give a picture of Life in Lancashire. This panel is the source of a quantitative view of the state of the transport network in Lancashire. MORI was engaged to conduct an opinion poll to establish baseline values and this poll will be repeated at three-yearly intervals to monitor changes. This information is viewed alongside qualitative information from an extensive list of interests which continues to grow.

Lancashire County Council has shown its commitment to achieving a balance between countywide and local needs and provision through delivery of the Locality Focus Agenda. We have established the Lancashire Strategic Partnership and appointed District Partnership Officers in all District Council areas. We have set up Lancashire Local Committees to bring decision making on County Council functions closer to communities. They will strengthen policy making to reflect local needs, develop further joint working between the County Council and District Councils and enhance

engagement with Parish and Town Councils. Devolution of highway, planning and maintenance management to new Area Offices will allow greater local participation.

Parish Councils are engaged through our Parish Partnerships programme. In addition to everyday contact between officers, there are formal partnerships, such as the Community Safety Partnerships, to deal with specific topics. All these forums have provided opportunities for Unitary, District, Parish and Town Councils to participate in the development of the Lancashire Local Transport Plan.”

http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/environment/ltp/ltp_web/section_12210429218.asp

From Rural Policy website pages:

“Within Rural Policy & Projects we work with a range of community groups and organisations on projects and initiatives which both regenerate and improve our rural communities and areas.

Involving the community in local action enables projects to be tailored to local circumstances providing a more relevant solution. We look to support local actions which deliver sustainable solutions by advising, facilitating and where we can financially supporting local community action.”

http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/atoz/a_to_z/service.asp?u_id=2826&strSL=R

From Lancashire Criminal Justice Board - Monthly Update, March 2008

“A joint Inspection of the Lancashire Criminal Justice Board took place in November 2007. The three key areas the inspection focussed on were:-

- *Leadership/partnership*
- *Domestic Violence*
- *Community Engagement*

The Inspection Report has now been received with two recommendations:-

- *Improve Delivery Plans to ensure they are comprehensive and appropriately monitored.*
- *Improve confidence in the local criminal justice system and strengthen planning process to reflect community priorities by developing a co-ordinated approach to community engagement”*

One of the Criminal Justice Boards key priorities for 2008 was to:

“Increase the levels of public confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of the CJS. The Board is to implement national guidance in relation to community engagement and is also introducing community courts. Staff engagement is also high on the agenda and the Board has introduced an Internal Communications Group to develop this work.”

http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/education/youth_offending/lcjb/2008_march_update

Extract from the Lancaster Locals constitution:

“Lancashire Local – Lancaster District is a Joint Committee of the County Council and Lancaster City Council. The aim is to strengthen local democratic accountability through empowering locally elected Councillors to take decisions, shape and influence the delivery of local government services in Lancaster District...Meetings of the Lancashire Local will generally be open to the press and public and local people interested in specific agenda items will be able to have their say before decisions are taken. But Lancashire Locals are not primarily about community engagement.”

<http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/council/meetings/committees/locals/committee.asp?cid=1278>

6 Local learning from the scoping survey

Overview

- Sent out widely to partners, offering variety of ways to respond
- Targeted invites to 'stakeholders'
- 49 responses received
- Partners (22) - Covering most sectors. Mostly email replies.
- Stakeholders (27) – Majority voluntary sector, but range of others too. Wider range of methods used to get replies
- Parishes responded well (7) – Often using the written form and post

Who responded

- Partners – Roles: Mainly senior officer or those with a community engagement role. Sector: Fair spread, mainly LA or Parish,
- Stakeholders - Roles: Leaders - Chief Officer/ Management committee members. Sector: Varied/Mixture of past contact with LDLSP

6.1 Partners responses to how they engage

- Larger agencies have specific staff for engagement, few did overall
- Majority state they have a strategy
- Patchy information on how these are made public
- Few mentioned core values or mission
- Many described activities or referred to higher level strategies
- Health had most specific definition and model

Techniques for engagement:

Most effective methods

- Public meetings
- Press and media (communications strategy)
- Area based planning
- Exhibition and open days
- Focus groups
- Road shows
- Service Newsletters

Most common methods

- Formal consultations
- Inviting written comments
- Complaints/suggestion schemes
- Public meetings
- Exhibitions and open days
- Postal surveys
- Focus groups / user groups

Rarely used but regarded as effective

- Area based planning
- Press and media reports (communication strategies)
- Road shows

- Service newsletters/ magazines

Suggestions: Make use of personal contacts, deliberative forums and working groups, get good news stories in the press

Improving on current engagement–

- Majority had not tried something new
- New work often based on increased interactivity and increasing the voice and influence of a specific client group
- One organisation mentioned participatory budgeting and neighbourhood management
- Majority wish to improve
- Consultation champions, building staff skills and partnership seen as good ways to improve
- Few commit resources such as training front line staff or an identified budget
- Collaboration welcomed, but patchy
- Partnership offers opportunities to exchange/trade in best practice
- Information wanted on opportunities to collaborate more
- Measuring impacts patchy - often based on impressions and informally monitoring contacts.
- Need better techniques to measure impact of engagement.
- Feeding back is also patchy - Many didn't answer this question (Q43)
- Sources of advice and information most often sort through existing networks or line management
- Partnership not mentioned very often as route to getting support with engagement

Views about community engagement

- Support for the idea and that it makes a difference
- Less feel confident in doing engagement work
- Even less feel confident about finding support
- Generally partners are positive, feel they are already doing engagement work and it makes a difference

(My view is the 'Consultation' model predominates – people were confident about doing consultation, but less so on empowerment.)

Views about improving community engagement

- LDLSP can be a conduit to facilitate engagement
- Put in place more collaborative engagement - share resources, exchange, act together.
- Good practice information from the LSP would be welcome
- LDLSP should demonstrate collective responsibility and commitment to community engagement and to involving the voluntary, community and faith sector.

6.2 Stakeholders views about engagement

- Not as positive as the partners.
- Public bodies were not seen to be doing enough
- Want more decision making power devolved
- Most felt there were often problems when they tried to engage
- Most felt they hadn't recently been consulted about local services

Experiences of engagement

- Those that felt they had been engaged well felt positive about engagement
- Stakeholders valued been taken seriously and listened too
- LDLSP received a degree of criticism as not being responsive
- Processes around partnership still have some way to go

Effectiveness of engagement

- Very high levels of belief that engagement can improve public services
- Engagement is seen important to their own performance
- Mixed responses to whether it's always a positive experience – poor feedback matters as does perceptions of tokenism
- Very mixed about whether its improving

Ideas to improve engagement

- Put emphasis on Parishes and neighbourhoods – natural level for engagement to occur
- There is a desire for the LDLSP to be more flexible and less bureaucratic

My impression overall was that many, though not all responses were influenced by the way the Partnership is sometimes perceived as a distant and poorly understood body. These may be unfair perceptions but need to be challenged.

7 Recommendations for developing a local CEF

An overview of the recommendations would include:

- Seeing engagement as a developmental process – moving people up the ladder through building social capital
- Differentiating between short term and ongoing forms of engagement. Longer term engagement is more likely to be empowering – repeated processes are essential to build up trust.
- Adopt a clear model for engagement, based on high level principles rather than specific tools – see Health models as an exemplar, amongst others, and respond to the research they pointed to that shows:

“Many factors contribute to a lack of effective strategic partnerships between lay communities and statutory organisations. These factors fall into five domains:

- *the community's capacity to engage;*
- *the skills and competencies of organisational staff;*
- *the dominant professional service culture;*
- *the overall organisational ethos and culture; and*
- *the dynamics of the local and national political systems.”*

7.1 Overcoming barriers to change

Establish local ‘action’ to address the 5 factors outlined above. For example:

- Hold a multi-stakeholder conference with these factors as specific themes and use that conference to develop local solutions.
- Review mechanisms to support the community capacity to engage
- Develop local training opportunities for delivery staff.
- Promote community based commissioning and address issue of local procurement and funding particularly as they affect the local VCFS.
- Shadowing, exchange and mentoring initiatives to address barriers arising from internalised organisational culture.
- Involve councillors in cross party discussion on the local role of participatory democracy in supporting representative democracy.
- Engage with Regional Efficiency and Improvement Partnerships (REIPS) (see <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageld=746868>)
- Review corporate governance as recommended by the Audit Commission and in particular see the 4 self assessment question in appendix 3 (see Corporate Governance: Improvement and trust in local public services, October 2003 at <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/>)

7.2 What not to do

- Promote a ‘one size fits all’ solution with pre-determined outcomes without sufficient deliberation within the partnership. Issues or constraints and their solutions need to be openly debated before a specific framework is adopted.
- Avoid conflict, rather put in place means to deal with conflict.
- See community engagement as a performance management process.
- Hold to overly bureaucratic and formalised procedures.
- Use the consultation model of engagement, where a preferred option is proposed and comments are then requested.
- Forget to put a price on engagement – it should cost and have a budget.

- Assume engagement infrastructure will remain in place on its own – it needs support from a dedicated engagement worker.

7.3 Leadership starts within the partnership

This does not mean individual leadership, but rather collective leadership. It is about strengthening partnership working first, and then moving to engage more widely,

- Long term commitment by all to partnership and clear vision of benefits
- Ask all partners to commit some definable resources to the partnership
- Establish better partnership audit/feedback processes – explore social auditing as a route to performance improvement and improved governance
- Review the partnership communication strategy
- Focus on tackling issues of internal culture and silo working
- Focus on clearly communicating the responsibility of all members of the LDLSP, and especially councillors, to operate as community leaders
- Move beyond the ‘consultation culture’ towards a deliberative culture
- Learn from best practice by empowering local champions
- Organisational risk analysis and mapping the resources spent on engagement.

7.4 Support opportunities to collaborate on engagement

- Establish a coherent and well resourced ‘engagement calendar’
- Map out any opportunities to engage collaboratively – to become more strategic and more experienced about joint working
- Establish a comprehensive geographical framework focussing at a parish and the ‘sub ward’ neighbourhood level – find the natural level of community.
- Promote the use of area based planning (e.g. Parish plans, Participatory appraisal, action research)
- Enable both informal and structured networking opportunities
- Celebrate good practice by establishing annual engagement awards.

7.5 Create opportunities for learning on engagement

- Innovation funding – Use LDLSP resources to facilitate collaborative engagement and trial new methods of engagement such as participatory budgeting
- Hold a conference to share good practice and produce a ‘charter’ for engagement
- Invest in prevention through investing in innovations in the ‘social economy’
- Use expertise within the voluntary sector to support training for frontline staff
- Ask partners to improve on this report within their areas of expertise.

7.6 Agree a high level statement on engagement

Use “The Brisbane Declaration” as a starting point for local engagement:

- **Integrity** – Openness and honesty about scope and purpose of engagement;
- **Inclusion** - Opportunity for a diverse range of values and perspectives to be freely and fairly expressed and heard;
- **Deliberation** – Sufficient and credible information for dialogue, choice and decisions, and space to weigh options, develop common understandings and appreciate respective roles and responsibilities;
- **Influence** – People have input in designing how they participate, policies and services reflect their involvement and their impact is apparent.