



## **Communication and Community Engagement – A guide to Quality Status**

Good communications and community involvement is critical to earning and maintaining the good will of the community you serve. Community engagement is a significant factor in building local trust, improving the level of satisfaction of local residents and of providing your council with a greater understanding of the needs and views of the local community. Good community engagement also builds trust with the principal authority and can lead to better cooperative working.

As part of the amended 'Communication and Community Engagement' Quality criteria there is now a mandatory requirement for councils to have their own website which provides; a list of council members and officers, together with details of how they can be contacted and; provides access to your annual report. The discretionary section has also changed with two new options; the formulation of a community engagement strategy and the provision of a regular weblog on your website or the provision of online forums or surveys. The purpose of this document is to provide advice and guidance as to how you might meet these tests.

### **Website**

As statutory public bodies councils should be embracing modern communication methods to engage with their communities, although this is not to say that more traditional methods are not effective. It is hoped that this test will broaden the communication methods employed by local councils.

It is clear that there is some concern that creating a website may be beyond the budget or know-how of some councils. However, there are now a broad range of options that can simplify the process. Many councils now have their own website but many others utilise web pages put aside for them by their district or county council or take advantage of local or national web portals. There are also a significant number of providers with experience of providing websites for our tier.

For more information contact your local county association or NALC for more details.

### **Community engagement strategy**

Community engagement is about giving local people a voice and involving them in the decisions that affect them and their community. It is about the development of relationships and clear communication to deliver better services and projects.

The aim of a community engagement strategy should be to engage residents and encourage their participation in decision making to secure better services and to create a more active and informed community. We would not expect your community engagement strategy to be overly complex but we would expect it to set out how your council will engage its community across a broad range of its activities and we would expect that it look at short-, medium- and long-term aims.

There are a number of areas you may wish to consider when putting together your community engagement strategy (again this is for illustrative purposes);

How do you currently communicate with your community and how can you improve these lines of communication?

Do you regularly consult your community?

Do you know what your community wants or expects from its council?

How content is your community with existing services?

How well do you communicate with hard to reach groups or young people?