

National Standards for Community Engagement

Illustrations from the pilots



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INTRODUCTION

The illustrations from the pilots aim to provide examples on how the National Standards for Community Engagement can be used to support and improve community engagement in Scotland.

The illustrations have been identified from the piloting of the standards which took place between April and December 2004. The purpose of the pilots was to test the capacity of the standards to support effective community engagement in a range of different settings.

The illustrations have been organised around each of the 10 standards and should therefore be used alongside the standards booklet.



THE PILOTS

The draft standards were tested in six sites – Dundee, Dunoon, Glasgow, Helensburgh, Stirling and West Lothian.

In each place different kinds of community engagement were being undertaken or planned. These included:

- investigating application of the standards across a community planning partnership;
- using them to support a local community plan;
- applying them to the work of local regeneration development groups (LRDGs) in two social inclusion partnership areas;
- planning a community health initiative; and
- progressing the work of a partnership focused on the needs of parents and pre-school children.

Each of these experiences has been written up in a case study available on the Communities Scotland website.

USING THE STANDARDS

The pilots identified examples for each of the 10 standards. For some, there is substantial information, and for this reason they are illustrated with just one example. In others, the standard was addressed as part of a wider range of work and in these instances, several shorter examples are offered.

The importance of each standard is illustrated in the examples. However, it is important to note the close links between some of the standards. Some of the examples not only illustrate the core theme but also identify good practice in relation to other standards as well.

INVOLVEMENT:

we will identify and involve the people and organisations with an interest in the focus of the engagement

BOUNDARY CHANGES

A local regeneration development group (LRDG) faced the challenge of expanding its boundaries and agreeing how to involve the full range of community interests in the widened area.

The area bordered a national park whose staff had supported the establishment of community trusts in villages in the area. There were also established community councils and a range of other established recreational, sporting and social groups. However, there were also gaps in the range of community interests including groups with a focus on disability, mental health and men's health, older people, young people and drug misuse.

The standards were to be used to raise awareness of how the discussion should be conducted and new participatory structures be established.

The involvement standard and indicators helped to think about establishing contacts in the new area and developing a dialogue that would be inclusive and diverse. Addressing the involvement standard posed a question: *"Who are the people and interests that are relevant to regeneration?"*

Applying the involvement standard not only required consideration of who the participants needed to be in the widened engagement structure but also how the development group would take account both of the interests of those who were already organised and those not yet organised. Other standards, particularly the support and methods ones, came into play. For example the discussion triggered recognition of the need to use a range of locations for meetings of the local development group and put in supports to help people participate if it meant travelling some distance to go to meetings (for example, transport, crèche).

To meet the involvement indicators it was recognised that a variety of methods of engagement were needed. Methods used included a drop-in facility in a local hall, advertising through the local community trust newsletters, planned meetings between community representatives from the existing and new regeneration areas, outreach to existing and support to new groups. It was felt that the outreach approach adopted to foster involvement was essential and that it was overcoming barriers that might affect particular groups.

Using the involvement standard and indicators provided a reference point for planning and reviewing how to tackle the expansion of the regeneration area boundaries.

SUPPORT:

we will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement

ADDRESSING SUPPORT NEEDS

In every pilot the importance of the support standard and indicators was readily acknowledged. All six pilots wanted to ensure that engagement reflected community diversity and was inclusive. Therefore, reviewing performance in this area was a significant feature of the pilots. Though the issues were often well understood before the standard was considered, performance was often found to be weaker than their perception of it.

A local community planning partnership reviewed their community engagement practice and compared it against the standards. Specifically in relation to support, they found that there was a general need to address financial and practical barriers. They recognised that partners should be more pro-active in offering financial and practical support, rather than expecting people to approach officials for help. As one person put it: "If we don't offer financial help we only get those people for whom it is not a barrier!"

A local regeneration development group set aside time at one of its meetings to review the support standard. Their general approach demonstrated high commitment to good practice in many respects, for example: resourcing community development support for community representatives, considering timing of meetings and providing childcare. However, an explicit review of whether community representatives were getting the support they needed to participate highlighted some hidden shortcomings, such as claiming expenses being felt to be complicated or embarrassing, poor public transport sometimes being a barrier and care needs for dependents other than children not being addressed. Highlighting strengths and weaknesses enabled practical proposals for improvement to be made.

Another local regeneration development group carefully considered the implications of the support standards when expanding the boundaries of the area covered. Continuing to meet the support needs of participants in the wider area required recognition that participants would have different levels of access to equipment and the location and timing of meetings might need to be reconsidered.

PLANNING:

we will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken

'ARE OFFICIALS COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY?'

As part of the development of a neighbourhood community plan, residents and agency partners agreed that there was a need to undertake an audit of community engagement by agencies operating in the area. The review aimed to provide evidence of how engagement was being conducted, what resources were being used and how this could contribute to the development of more effective practice for the local community plan. The key question was: "*Are officials communicating effectively with people?*"

The focus of the audit was to inform planning but, by its nature, it was also applying the methods standards to assess what was being done. The audit identified 27 different methods and 91 engagement activities. The agencies involved asked for feedback and guidance from the community on the most appropriate methods. Using the indicators for the methods standard, residents reviewed the most frequently used methods. Each one had benefits and limitations. For example: questionnaires could focus the mind, get honest responses and target particular groups but had weaknesses in terms of response rates and literacy issues; public meetings could lead to exchange of views, make public agencies visible and accountable but were not always well attended and sometimes led to some people 'sounding off'; newsletters were good at providing detailed information, reaching out and targeting but were often ignored, were time consuming to produce and required good levels of literacy.

Asking whether the methods being used were 'fit for purpose' the community offered constructive criticism on the need for diverse approaches. The methods identified were categorised in relation to the four themes of the partnerships' community engagement and communications strategy – information, understanding, dialogue and participation. This made it easier to see the strengths and limitations of the different methods and reinforced the need to adopt a variety of approaches.

The findings of the audit were presented to the Neighbourhood Partnership Network (NPN) with a view to turning the evidence into a strategic plan. Many important issues emerged, for example: timescales for consultations, engaging the most vulnerable and excluded people, addressing financial and practical barriers that were inhibiting participation, building an evaluation process into the plan, improving agency staff skills for community engagement. In turn these conclusions were taken forward to a discussion with community representatives, which, falling on Burns night, was accompanied by a haggis lunch!

METHODS:

we will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose

REACHING OUT

The multi-agency Early Years Partnership wanted to improve health and learning outcomes for children and to do so by reaching out to engage parents and children. They focused on thinking about the purpose of engagement and methods that would be 'fit for purpose'. It was agreed that the purpose was:

- To find out what people want for under threes
- To integrate local services
- To identify gaps in services and plan the use of the funding
- To give and get information about services
- To value the opinions and 'lived experience' of local people
- To encourage self help and participation
- To encourage community participation in the early years group and find out how parents might want to be involved

They agreed that the initial means of engaging the community should be through a community survey conducted by member of the partnership with local parents in a range of places where parents and children meet, for example, the shopping mall and outside schools and nurseries. Careful thought was given to the timing and form of the survey and locations for data collection.

Whilst the conduct of the survey resulted in a range of useful information, it was recognised that to promote active engagement it had to be used to promote continuing dialogue. Here consideration of the feedback standards led to very imaginative proposals for the way that the survey data would be used. The results were presented through the use of an interactive community arts approach. A shop unit in the local mall was rented and used for a visual display of the results of the survey under the heading 'Dream a better future'. Play facilities were available and members of the partnership took turns to be there to talk to people about the needs of parents and young children. (For details see feedback example.)

The response of the public to the shop was good. A dialogue was fostered with hundreds of parents of young children. The range of issues discussed included: community safety issues (traffic calming and underpasses), dog fouling, access to play facilities, activities for children, supportive services for parents. Those who wished could register an interest in being involved in further activities and discussions. As it was coming up to Christmas it was decided to invite these people to come with their children to a party and meeting. Crèche workers and entertainers were involved and parents split their time between

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METHODS

we will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose

METHODS

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the party and a discussion about how to progress action on issues identified. Parents with a particular interest were becoming more formally and actively involved in the work of the partnership.

Reflection on the method standard and indicators had helped to bring about an exciting and productive process of 'fit for purpose' engagement that motivated further interest in involvement both from community members and from the agency staff involved in the partnership.



WORKING TOGETHER:

we will agree and use clear procedures to enable the participants to work with one another efficiently and effectively

INTEGRATED PARTNERSHIP WORKING

A community planning partnership (CPP) focused on whether and how all the members of the partnership could make use of the standards. Though it also involved elements of planning, monitoring and evaluation, the core focus was on their capacity to use the standards as a common framework to inform the way they worked together and collectively how they would engage with communities. At this stage of the work the CPP focus of consideration in relation to the working together standard was on inter-agency partnership working rather than direct community engagement, though the former was seen as a prelude to the latter.

The discussions were conducted through a sub-group of the CPP and were entirely between the council services (particularly community learning and development, community governance, community engagement and community safety) and other agency partners (particularly the police, health board and local enterprise company). The dialogue related to assessing current policies and practices of each agency in community engagement and their implications for common application of the standards for community engagement. The standards themselves were being used as a development tool for partnership working.

Particular indicators from the working together standard were relevant. Any effective partnership requires open, honest, positive and respectful relationships between its members and the dialogue in the sub-group reflected these attributes. However, the more demanding indicators for the partnership were: recognition of the different obligations and statutory requirements of partners; the need to take decisions on the basis of agreed procedures and shared knowledge; attention to resolving tensions and potential conflicts of interest between partners. There was no lack of goodwill in relation to these issues but there were real differences in terms of the operational practices and policy contexts of the work of different partners. It was recognised that agencies such as police, health board and enterprise company were simultaneously part of three community planning partnerships and would need to adopt consistent principles and practices for community engagement across them all. Similarly, from an early stage it was acknowledged that some partners were subject to other sources of guidance on community engagement, for example, the Scottish Executive Health Department had issued guidance entitled: 'Informing, engaging and consulting the public'.

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WORKING TOGETHER

we will agree and use clear procedures to enable the participants to work with one another efficiently and effectively

WORKING TOGETHER

(continued)

For the standards to be used as a framework to help the partners to work together, it would be essential to explore their compatibility with existing obligations and to discover how far they were already evident in the engagement practices of the partners. To this end the sub-group developed a scorecard that would be used to assess the engagement practices of the core partners. The scorecard identified whether each indicator was regarded as a basic requirement that was already met, as something that there was active commitment to work towards, or whether it was just a desirable aspiration that could not currently be achieved. By the end of the pilot the review was incomplete but the evidence will be drawn together to enable debate of how partners can work together adopting the standards as a common framework.

SHARING INFORMATION:

we will ensure necessary information is communicated between the participants

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

The importance of the effective and efficient sharing of information between participants was a feature of all of the pilots. Various illustrations of the issues involved in addressing this standard are available.

In the Early Years Partnership a range of agencies were coming together and needed to have a clear understanding of each others roles. Attention in early meetings was given to talking about the contributions that each agency made which clarified what each could offer to the planning of the engagement with the local community. The partnership was generally imaginative in its methods of communication (see feedback example below) and this was reflected in the way that particular agencies and workers explained their work. For example a parent support worker demonstrated the benefits of a summer play and confidence building programme using a PowerPoint presentation including examples of photographs and other work created by the participants. Sharing information between participants in an accessible and attractive manner helped build the strengths of the partnership.

Both local regeneration development groups operated in the same local authority area. During the period of the pilot they were discussing complex issues such as Regeneration Outcome Agreements and community planning. Participants were involved in local LRDG discussion and in council-wide conferences on these matters. Bringing community and agency representatives together at the council-wide level enabled the issues to be explained and explored in a way that assisted with the discussion of more specific local implications.

In the pilot focusing on a local community plan the Council had in place a 'Community Engagement and Communication Strategy' that already addressed the requirements of the sharing information standard. In particular it stated: *'The provision and exchange of information is a two-way process. While we will disseminate and encourage the circulation of information about Council services we will also gather and re-present intelligence about communities to better inform the planning and delivery of council services. Central to this strategy is the desire to improve the quality of information to local people...'* The focus of the work in this area was on assessing the methods of community engagement that were being used and community and agency representatives were able to assess, against the standards, the effectiveness of a range of communications methods such as newsletters, brochures, email briefings, websites, annual reports and public meetings.

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SHARING INFORMATION

we will ensure necessary information is communicated between the participants

SHARING INFORMATION

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Alongside the good examples of practice in relation to sharing information, some significant difficulties encountered in the pilots resulted from poor communications. Most notably examples arose from a pace of change demanded by public agencies that was not always compatible with effective community engagement. Examples included the development of the Regeneration Outcome Agreements and Community Wardens schemes.



WORKING WITH OTHERS:

we will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement

BEING CONNECTED

Though not a primary focus of any of the pilots, the need to retain effective relationships with others that are affected by a particular community engagement initiative were recognised and addressed in several examples.

The pilot focusing on application of the standards for use by a community planning partnership was frequently required to think about the implications of the relationship between themselves, the partner agencies and other partnerships and community engagement structures that they were involved in. For example several agencies were simultaneously members of two other community planning partnerships. For them it was essential that consistent standards and approaches to engagement could be adopted in all of them. Planning for one area therefore required acknowledgement and accommodation of the interests of parallel structures.

In one of the local regeneration development groups, work with community representatives resulted in the emergence of the hidden issue of drug misuse in the community. At that stage there was little direct involvement of agencies that work with drug users. Before proceeding to consider the issues it was important to identify who had skills and knowledge on which the LRDG could draw. Both the community development worker supporting community representatives and the lead officer of the LRDG itself were readily able to do this because they were well networked into the range of public and voluntary agencies active in their community. They were able therefore to draw on relevant expertise and engage new participants in the work of the LRDG. Having a good working relationship with others who could have an interest in the engagement enabled a rapid and informed response to a newly identified concern.

Reviewing their survey work and dialogue with the local community about needs of pre-school children and their parents, the Early Years Partnership realised that as their collaboration developed they must retain the support of each of their employing agencies. Members recognised that the continued positive development of the partnership required them to ensure that they remained fully accountable to their own agencies as well as to the jointly agreed objectives of the partnership.

IMPROVEMENT:

we will develop actively the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants

ADDRESSING A NEW ISSUE

A local regeneration development group (LRDG) providing a forum for dialogue between community and agency representatives recognised the importance of supporting the participation of community representatives through dedicated involvement of a community development worker in a community representatives group (CRG). This group met between formal meetings of the LRDG to review issues arising in the community and from the LRDG and considered how to take forward the interests of the community effectively. The standards were being piloted in the LRDG but the community representatives recognised that they might help them in their role and requested support to use them in their work. For them the application of the standards became a means of improving their capacity to be effective, knowledgeable and confident representatives of the community.

Discussion of the involvement standard among the community representatives led them to consider whether all the interests in the community and all the agencies that were relevant to the issues that community faced were involved. The main concern to emerge was that, despite their feeling that it was a major issue in the area, the LRDG did not include participants that were addressing drug misuse issues. The discussion explored the issue of drug misuse itself and its implications in terms of anti-social behaviour, crime and health. It was agreed that drug misuse should be raised at the LRDG. This resulted and the concern was recognised.

However, the community representatives recognised that they had different opinions about drug misuse and how it should be tackled, they also recognised that their views were not always based on extensive knowledge. With the support of the community development worker, they undertook to invite to their meetings knowledgeable informants such as the police, a project working on emotional literacy with young people, a health visitor, and the young homeless project. These very informal discussions led to considerable change in perspectives on the issues and enabled the representatives to participate more effectively, confidently and in a more informed manner in the discussion at the subsequent LRDG meetings.

The way the group was conducting itself demonstrated good practice in relation to the improvement standard. It illustrated commitment to acquiring necessary information, to improving the capacity of representatives to be effective, to planning in the light of investigating the need to be addressed, to working together effectively with other partners. By bringing forward the issue in this way it also encouraged the LRDG as a whole not only to take on the issue but also to invite presentations from agencies with a specialist knowledge that could inform its thinking and actions.

FEEDBACK:

we will feed back the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected

'DREAM SOMETHING BETTER!'

The Early Years Partnership had conducted a survey of community opinion about needs of and services for parents and young children (see methods example). They wanted to use the information gathered to promote an active dialogue with parents that could lead to more effective action based on community and agency involvement. They looked at the feedback standards and indicators and came up with a highly imaginative and effective way of using their survey results.

A shop unit in the local shopping mall was rented and opened every morning for two weeks with members of the partnership on hand to meet callers. It was set out with play space, soft play equipment, a black board and toys on one side and on the other a double bed with curtain drape, bedside cabinet, outside alarm clock, slippers and a rug. In the ceiling hung the words: *'Dream something better!'*

All of this was clearly visible from the outside. On the window was a notice saying who it was that was running the shop and inviting people to come in and talk about early years issues. Once inside it was immediately apparent that the pillows and quilt had things written on them. One pillow had pictures printed on it reflecting what people had complained about in the survey. The other had a set of pictures of things that people had valued and a bold map of the area. Callers were invited to look at the pillows, locate where they came from on the map and add any comments they wanted to the dialogue about the community. This was done by use of stencil-like sheets that could be written on and then ironed on to the quilt. One had the outline of a large face and a smaller one inside it. Adult comments went into the big face and children's comments into the smaller one. There were also sheets with 'dream bubbles' with boy or girl figures that children could fill in. The quilt therefore became the focus for comments and discussion. Disposable cameras were also available for people to take away and use to add to a photo display to go with people's comments.

Attracted by the bright display and play equipment, kids were very happy to go in though parents had to be encouraged. The display stimulated a lot of discussion and the general response was very positive resulting in contact with hundreds of children and parents. The presence in the mall enabled a dialogue between ordinary members of the community and the staff of the range of partnership agencies that were taking turns to be in the shop. Staff clearly enjoyed the experiences, valuing the collaboration that was going on between them and the contact with the public. Service providers were visible and accessible. By listening and providing information they demonstrated their interest in community concerns and the desire to work with local people to achieve positive improvements.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION:

we will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement meets its purposes and the national standards for community engagement

DIALOGUE AND HEALTH

A healthy living project working in an inner city area with a focus on black and minority ethnic (BME) communities has a track record of extending participation and engaging in dialogue with health service and social care agencies. Through a Scottish Community Action Research Fund (SCARF) project it investigated how the BME community can overcome barriers and achieve equal access to primary health care services. The study highlighted the need for an action project and the Community Fund has supported a Public Policy, Active Citizenship (PPAC) initiative. In planning this, the healthy living project has used the standards and given particular attention to how they can help them to establish a framework of measures and indicators that they can use to monitor and evaluate performance once the PPAC is initiated. To do this they have integrated their use of the standards within an application of the LEAP (Learning Evaluation and Planning) framework.

The standards have been used first to clarify the outcomes that the project should deliver, then to identify indicators and measures that can be used to provide convincing evidence that the project is achieving its purposes. The outcomes and measures and indicators have both been incorporated into a work-plan for the project.

The outcomes were identified as:

- Increased confidence of BME community members to effectively influence policy makers and health professionals to take action on community identified health priority areas
- Increased participation of BME members, men in particular, in health and social policy development and in accessing mainstream healthcare services
- Increased understanding and awareness of BME health needs and the importance of community participation in policy discussions by policy makers and health and social care professionals.

In relation to these outcomes potential indicators and measures were identified. Each of these was then assessed against the standards. Examples of the way the standards influenced the indicators include:

- in the light of reviewing the involvement standard, attention to more indicators on reaching hidden groups within the BME community
- in relation to methods, indicators to critically assess whether engagement methods are too Euro-centric in style
- in relation to support, indicators assessing the performance of health and social care providers in enabling BME communities to participate
- as a response to the feedback standard, the introduction of an indicator on community activists feeding back to the communities they represent

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

we will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement meets its purposes and the national standards for community engagement

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- in relation to the planning standard, indicators to demonstrate that communities are engaged from the beginning

Though the evaluation framework has not yet been applied the standards are acknowledged to have contributed to more rigorous thinking about both what should be achieved and what evidence will be needed to demonstrate success.

MONITORING PERFORMANCE

A local regeneration development group (LRDG) recognised that one of the benefits that the standards for community engagement could provide would be a means of assessing their own performance as a community engagement structure. In an initial review of each of the standards it was agreed that they were all relevant to the work that was being done. It was therefore agreed that it needed to take account of the range of standards and indicators.

However in practical terms monitoring performance against all the indicators at the monthly meetings would be a daunting prospect and courted the risk that, rather than enabling better performance, attention to the standard could actually get in the way of the conduct of the business itself. Indeed this proved to be the case. As a first attempt to use the standards to monitor progress it was decided to set aside time at the end of each meeting to review what had been discussed against the standards. This proved cumbersome in terms of the scope of what needed to be considered. It also proved to be problematic in that, addressing any deficiencies in performance, meant that it was necessary to revisit agenda items that had already been formally discussed and on which action had been agreed. A different approach was needed.

The second approach was not to attempt to cover all standards at every meeting but to begin each meeting with a brief review of just one standard. This proved much more productive. Three questions were addressed: how good or bad is the LRDG at this; how do we know and how do we improve on or maintain this level of performance?

This enabled positive and negative aspects of the way the LRDG was functioning to be highlighted. For example, whilst there was ample evidence that participants valued and wanted to be part of the LRDG there were nonetheless improvements that could make them feel more positive, such as: avoiding jargon, keeping to time, providing feedback, and ensuring there are practical results. Clearly some of these things are easier to achieve than others but for the most part it was practical and relatively straightforward improvements to practice that were being identified around which action could often be taken immediately.

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MONITORING AND EVALUATION

we will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement meets its purposes and the national standards for community engagement

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

(continued)

The LRDG had therefore introduced a continuous monitoring process but it was felt that there was also a need to evaluate performance against all the indicators simultaneously. It was agreed that an annual review day would use the standards and associated indicators as the framework for joint performance assessment by community and agency representatives. The first such day was held shortly after the pilot period.

Building in simple means of monitoring performance against the standards enabled them to become a live and relevant feature of the work of the LRDG.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about the national standards for community engagement, contact Communities Scotland's Community Engagement Team:

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SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE