

Community Involvement Strategy



Luton**Forum**

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1. Introduction

Background

The Luton Forum is the Local Strategic Partnership bringing together key local organisations and public bodies such as the Council, Police, Fire and Rescue Service, NHS Luton, University of Bedfordshire; voluntary and community organisations, and private companies

The partnership's vision and strategy for how everyone would like Luton to be in 2026 – the Sustainable Community Strategy – recommends developing a more joined up approach to community involvement.

Partners are already working together successfully in many areas but in the main, they have developed their own separate approaches to community involvement.

Our common starting point must be how, together, we can empower Luton citizens to:

- set priorities
- influence and make decisions
- help improve services
- build strong communities.

We need to get the right balance of involvement – neither too much nor too little – for all citizens.



By coordinating our approach we will avoid duplication and become more cost effective. We want to put in place involvement arrangements based on how citizens wish to be involved.

This document sets out a coordinated and strategic approach to community involvement involving all partners.

Community involvement is key to the democratic process and this strategy aims to help in the renewal of local democracy, with councillors taking a key role in community leadership.

Citizens

We have used citizens as a general term to include all those who live, work, rest and play in Luton. This includes for example people, residents, communities, businesses and organisations.

Involvement

It is easy to be confused by a range of terms such as information, consultation, engagement, involvement and empowerment.

We have used "involvement" as a general term to cover all of these.

Government policy also reflects greater partnership with communities with a new Duty to Involve on public organisations (see www.lutonforum.org).

Public bodies often have legislative requirements in how to involve citizens. Sometimes consultation also has to be carried out at short notice, for example to take advantage of funding opportunities. This strategy aims to be complementary and support these requirements.



2. Luton's profile

We are proud of Luton. It is a vibrant and diverse community.

But Luton is very different from the rest of Bedfordshire. The town's profile presents many strengths, as well as challenges, including:

- a vibrant voluntary and community sector – with many organisations supported by Voluntary Action Luton
- a relatively young population, set to increase to 2021
- an ethnically diverse population – 35% of people are from black, and minority ethnic backgrounds
- decreasing levels of crime
- a place where, on the whole, people from different backgrounds get on well together
- relatively high levels of deprivation
- fewer people with qualifications among the working age population than the national average
- relatively high unemployment compared to the national average
- an increasing elderly population, especially from 2011 to 2021
- comparatively low turnout in elections.

The most up to date information on Luton's profile is available at www.lutonforum.org

One size doesn't fit all

We need to consider communities as:

- communities of place or geographical area
- communities of identity, such as certain ethnicity, age group
- communities of a particular interest.

Many traditional ways of involving citizens are not always effective – only a minority of people are likely to attend public meetings, not everyone will fill in a questionnaire, and not everyone uses the internet.

Our community involvement strategy therefore has, as one of its key objectives, to ensure that engagement is representative. Every involvement activity needs to be designed and reviewed for how representative it is.

A different approach to involvement

We will not only be relying on citizens coming to us. In a co-ordinated way, we propose to go out to communities to find out their views.



3. Vision

Our vision is:

Luton will be a place where citizens are confident they can influence decisions and that their involvement is leading to both improved services and stronger communities. Partners will work together in a joined up, cost effective and supportive way to involve all citizens. This will result in the number of involved citizens increasing year by year.

4. Principles

- 1 Community involvement should be at the heart of how partners improve services, set priorities and use resources.
- 2 There should be a range of opportunities for involvement that are well publicised, link to local democracy and in which all citizens are encouraged to participate.
- 3 Methods for involvement should be regularly reviewed to ensure they are cost effective, and meet the preferences and needs of all citizens.
- 4 Citizens should receive clear and prompt feedback on how their involvement has helped to shape services, places and communities.
- 5 Partners should work in a joined up way to avoid duplication.
- 6 Involvement should be the basis on which partners increase satisfaction, build trust and confidence in their organisations.

These principles are of equal importance.

5. Objectives

The four objectives for our involvement strategy are:

- 1 To **empower** citizens, communities and organisations to set priorities, influence and make decisions together.
- 2 To **engage** a representative range of citizens and increase the number of citizens involved.
- 3 To **consult** in a cost effective, high quality, co-ordinated and sustainable manner.
- 4 To **inform** citizens, ensuring effective communication and prompt, clear feedback on involvement.



6. Where are we now?

Compared with other areas, Luton performs well according to the percentage of residents who feel they are able to influence decision making but we need to do more to improve this and achieve our vision.

Examples of what we do well include:

- new arrangements for **Neighbourhood Governance** which empower residents by developing community plans to be delivered by all partners
- Area Committees and **Ward Forums** providing a voice for all residents to have a say about local issues
- greater involvement with local people through the **Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership**, known as **soLUTIONs**, has resulted in decreasing crime rates in Luton
- the **Luton Assembly** which strategically represents the huge range of voluntary and community organisations in the borough
- new involvement methods for **young people**

The Council has an Overview and Scrutiny function which reviews policies and holds decision makers to account. Citizen engagement now has a central role in this, firstly as part of individual reviews and secondly in helping to determine the overall work programme. Scrutiny also reviews

how well partners have involved citizens in developing policies.

Examples of good practice by partners can be found at www.lutonforum.org

Our work has shown areas for improvement. We aim to:

- co-ordinate involvement with our partners
- plan involvement where possible with Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils
- avoid duplicating activities
- know the full extent of our involvement activities
- provide clear information and feedback to participants
- demonstrate value for money in our involvement activities
- share information about the needs, preferences of customers and feedback such as from complaints.

A fresh approach to involvement and engagement around equalities issues is needed to overcome challenges such as:

- involving more citizens including those seldom heard/asked and those who experience exclusion, disadvantage or discrimination
- building the skills of those involved on equality issues
- providing joined up involvement mechanisms for partners
- developing ways to involve citizens on complex equalities issues and plans

7. Action plan

Our action plan is focused on delivering real change and outcomes.

This section gives some examples of what we are doing to meet the objectives in section 5.

A more detailed plan with updates on progress can be seen at www.lutonforum.org

Objective 1

empower citizens, communities and organisations to set priorities, influence and make decisions together.

What we are doing

- Working with citizens to put together community plans through Neighbourhood Governance
- Involving local people in deciding funding for local projects (known as Participatory Budgeting)
- Involving citizens in the Scrutiny process
- Increasing the influence of voluntary and community organisations in decision making



Objective 2

engage a representative range of citizens and increase the number of citizens involved.

What we are doing

- Developing new ways to hear the views of people who normally do not get involved
- Carrying out research into how citizens wish to be involved and using this to plan our future involvement options
- Developing modern methods of engagement including web based, social networking and electronic voting

Objective 3

consult in a cost effective, high quality, co-ordinated and sustainable manner.

What are we doing

- Developing a model for partners to understand the true costs and benefits of consultation exercises and agreeing a programme of reviews
- Co-ordinating consultation and sharing “customer insight” information across all partners
- Developing a range of supportive consultation tools for all partners

Objective 4

Inform citizens, ensuring effective communication and prompt, clear feedback on involvement

What we are doing

- Researching how residents and organisations wish to receive information and feedback
- Developing information about feedback from involvement activities on the website www.lutonforum.org

8. How will we know if we have been successful?

We will assess the success of this strategy through:

- robust evaluation of the costs, benefits and outcomes of the action plan, including the number of citizens involved
- progress on the detailed action plan including reports to the Luton Forum, and Overview and Scrutiny Board

9. How this strategy was developed

This strategy has been developed by a range of partners through the Luton Forum and includes feedback from citizens.

The strategy is endorsed by the Luton Forum.

10. Useful websites

Other useful websites include:

- www.communities.gov.uk
- www.cdf.org.uk
- www.consultationinstitute.org
- www.involve.org.uk
- www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector.aspx
- www.youth.luton.gov.uk
- www.urbanforum.org.uk



LutonForum

Up to date information about this strategy can be found at:

www.lutonforum.org

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