

groups in the community and particularly socially excluded ones...the methods used to engage communities need...to [be] appropriate for the area, the community, the issue and the timescales”.

- 2.6 ‘Hard to reach’ is often taken to mean ‘equality communities’ such as BME residents, disabled residents, women, younger or older residents, LGBT residents, residents with different faiths. However, any group can face barriers to engagement, and become ‘hard to reach or hear’. These barriers will change with the contexts of different opportunities to engage.
- 2.7 Some residents will choose not to engage. However, if there are no barriers to stop them engaging if they wished, they should not be seen as ‘hard to reach.’

Building trust

- 2.8 Trust in public sector organisations is a complex issue, as discussed in the recent report ‘State of trust: how to build better relationships between councils and the public’ (Demos, 2009 <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/stateoftrust>).
- 2.9 After extensive research with residents and key stakeholders around England, Demos argue that residents’ trust in organisations is increased by the quality of interactions between the people that represent those organisations (officers and politicians), by feeling that decision making is fair and that services get better over time.
- 2.10 Therefore while trust does help engagement happen, positive engagement experiences also boosts feelings of trust.

Measuring progress

- 2.11 Improvement priority IO3A and IO3B are measured through the Leeds Residents Survey by the questions “how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the council allows residents a say in what it does” and “how well informed do you think the council keeps residents about the services and benefits it provides overall”.
- 2.12 The results from the 2009 Residents Survey are:
- 44% are satisfied with the way the council allows residents a say in what it does – in 2007 the result was 43%
 - 58% think the council keeps resident well informed about the services and benefits it provides overall – in 2007 the result was 51%
- 2.13 Results from the 2009 Leeds Residents Survey show that the About Leeds newspaper and council website are the most trusted– and most preferred – source of information about the council.

Examples of engagement activity

- 2.14 The council continues to carry out work aimed at increasing the involvement of local people in decision making. To increase engagement we must first understand how different residents wish to engage, so some of the work will be research into these issues.
- 2.14.1 Establishment of the Leeds Initiative Harmonious Communities Partnership and related Equality Hubs and Assembly will provide further opportunities for increasing engagement of groups whose voices are seldom heard.
- 2.14.2 There is also work underway to measure the monetary and social benefits of involving residents living in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in working with service providers. A number of demonstration projects are being developed to better understand and identify the factors that lead to more empowered, active and self reliant communities. The findings will inform a programme of community empowerment work across a wider range of neighbourhoods over time.
- 2.14.3 A wide range of consultations inform the way in which we plan and deliver services and provide a strong source of strategic intelligence. The use of press and media to communicate key messages to the public continues.

- 2.14.4 Area management teams are creating community engagement plans for each Area. The work of Area Committees and ward councillors continues to prioritise engagement.
- 2.14.5 The increased use of the Talking Point consultation coordination tool has helped officers understand the overall volume of consultation activity taking place and try and reduce duplication of work.
- 2.14.6 Two meetings of Leeds Initiative AnswerTime and one meeting of the Leeds Initiative Assembly were held and through this some 150 organisations gave their views from across the public, business, academic and third sectors.
- 2.14.7 The 2009 Leeds Residents Survey has delivered robust reporting on public perception to Area Committee level for use in Area Delivery Plans. This will be combined with results from other existing data sources, e.g. other surveys, Neighbourhood Index, MOSAIC data, and further research into public perceptions of 'value for money'.

Research and evaluation

- 2.14.8 Research designed to better understand effectiveness of consultation and communication activities is taking place in early 2010, in partnership with the PCT.
- 2.14.9 Research into the presentation of information through About Leeds, the A to Z of Services leaflet and the Council Tax pack recently finished.
- 2.14.10 Research into the role of the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) sector in engagement is being planned by the VCFS Engagement Sub Group, chaired by Leeds Voice with council support.
- 2.14.11 A strategy for the future of the council website has been developed.
- 2.14.12 The Leeds Strategic Involvement Leads (LSIL) group was recently set up to help public and voluntary sector organisations in the city work together on consultation and engagement issues.

3.0 Main Issues

Indicators

- 3.1 The current Improvement Priorities may mean different things to different people. For instance, does 'involvement' refer to taking part in council decision making, or to confident communities acting independently, or both?
- 3.2 Measuring progress is potentially complex, given the wide range of activities and communities that could be involved. The indicators currently used to show progress provide data on outcomes – being satisfied with being able to have a say, feeling informed or not, but do not show what leads to these outcomes.
- 3.3 Equally, the indicators do not specifically measure levels of trust, whether within communities or how far they trust the council. Again, trust is a complex issue that is hard to measure by single indicators.
- 3.4 Our indicators do not look at the quality of the experience for those getting involved, or the impact of that involvement on service development.

Challenges and risks

- 3.5 A number of challenges and risks relating to the Improvement Priorities have been identified by officers:
 - 3.5.1 A lack of expert support for council staff tasked with engaging.
 - 3.5.2 Inadequate coordination of council engagement activity.
 - 3.5.3 Not always giving feedback to residents that take part in council engagement activities.
 - 3.5.4 Not always being able to interpret intelligence gained from a range of sources.

3.5.5 A lack of understanding of what works and what doesn't for different communities.

Future action

- 3.6 Section 2.15 shows current work that should help reduce these risks and increase levels of engagement, and go some way to building trust in public sector bodies in Leeds. To make sure this work makes a significant impact we need to develop effective networks and structures for officers working in the engagement field.
- 3.7 We are starting to discuss how the council might create an 'Engagement'-focussed board, responsible for giving a lead on all types of engagement work, from informing to empowering. Equally, for consultation activity, there is a need for a formal group of skilled officers to help coordinate and deliver work across the council, achieving a consistent and high-value experience for any resident taking part in consultation, whatever the issue and whichever service is delivering it.
- 3.8 These issues are being addressed by members of the Communications Team and others, including the Strategic Planning and Policy Board.
- 3.9 A formal engagement structure should make it easier to work effectively with partners through the Leeds Strategic Involvement Leads (LSIL) group. This is an issue identified by the 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment. The Strategic Planning and Policy Board has started to look at making sure the most appropriate officers attend the LSIL group.
- 3.10 The initial discussions in the VCFS Community Engagement Sub-group show that the council often needs to work with or through voluntary and community organisations to engage certain communities. In many cases the voluntary or community groups have established a trusting relationship with vulnerable residents, or those that face barriers to engaging statutory organisations (our ability to address their cultural, language or learning disability issues, for example).
- 3.11 The council, and partners, need to know which voluntary or community groups are the best-placed to help us engage. The VCFS Community Engagement Sub-group has started to map these groups with the ambition to create a single database of useful contacts for officers to use.
- 4.0 **Conclusions**
- 4.1 There are a number of initiatives to improve the council's ability to meaningfully engage residents and other stakeholder groups.
- 4.2 Establishing a formal governance arrangement for engagement will be a major part of meeting this ambition.
- 4.3 There is a clear need to pool information, skills and resources between partners in the city to tackle these issues.
- 4.4 There is a need to understand how effective the council (and our partners) is at engaging residents; a number of research projects are planned to increase this understanding but it will need ongoing evaluation to prove any improvement over time. This means that better data on engagement will need to be captured as work is delivered.
- 4.5 We need to develop indicators that reflect the breadth and depth of activity or outcomes linked to this issue, particularly around trust.
- 5.0 **Recommendations**
- 5.1 That the Central and Corporate Functions Scrutiny Board considers and comments on the information presented in this report.