



Community Engagement and Empowerment Strategy 2009 – 2012

October 2009



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1. Summary

In order to revitalise and/or maintain sustainable communities living in the neighbourhoods where we operate it is necessary to develop collaborative processes which identify the complexity of problems to be tackled and then address them by making best use of the limited resources available to us and our partners.

Our community engagement and empowerment strategy underpins our commitment to involving our residents and is intended to support our strategy in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion and improve the delivery of our social investment into neighbourhoods. It sets out our approach to engagement at a local level, which seeks to strengthen the communities we serve by building their capacity and through the coordination of resources and actions into our neighbourhoods.

2. Background and strategic context

Community impact refers to the immediate and longer term effect both, positive and negative, of our operation on specific communities, which result directly from our corporate policies, core services and individual initiatives of the business.

Strategic community investment should set out how we will maximise our positive and minimise our negative community impacts, prioritising those that are most relevant to our core business and the services we provide, our staff, customers and stakeholders both in the short and long term.

There are both harder, more visible, physical features of community investment linked to asset management and the built environment and softer outcomes of community investment activity. This strategy focuses less on the former and more on the latter, incorporating access to and use of community facilities and resources and community development and capacity building initiatives.

Our community engagement and empowerment strategy, therefore, seeks to set out our intentions for prioritisation of local engagement and delivery of our related strategies associated with social investment activity into neighbourhoods, including community development and financial inclusion. It signals our rationale for localism, which is intended to compliment the national policy direction and Cornwall Council's own approach to local accountability.

It is important to direct our approach so that it fits our business plan, strategic directions and culture. Our strategy must focus on the following points:

- effectiveness of the investment rather than its size
- feeding into a wider corporate social responsibility agenda, rather than replacing it
- achieving the business reasons for investment

The first is less about the scale of the investment and more about making the level of investment work smarter and more effectively, with monitoring impact an essential ingredient. This will be further identified and dealt with through our asset management strategy along with our annual resident impact assessments.

The other points are about ensuring the strategy is planned and delivered as a tool to support wider corporate social responsibility, with consideration of environmental impact. Understanding the business case for each of these strands is thus important.

3. Purpose and scope

Our community engagement and empowerment strategy fits firmly with and supports our vision of:

- Better homes
 - Better places
 - Better lives
-in Cornwall

This vision is supported by the adoption of the following common values across the Group:

- putting our customers first
- delivering what we promise
- being open, honest and accountable
- promoting equality and fairness
- working in partnership
- always looking for ways to improve
- providing affordable high quality housing

- supporting and developing staff
- including and involving our customers
- becoming more environmentally responsible

This strategy further endorses these values and underpins in particular our vision of better places and better lives, through activities, which promote economic and social change and support communities, which are stronger, cohesive and engaged. The *purpose* of the strategy, which is for the period 2009 to 2012, is to set out more clearly our role in promoting and maintaining sustainable communities.

We recognise our role in investing in neighbourhoods beyond the homes we provide. Community investment describes a range of measures, activity and practice dedicated to increasing the appearance, strength and effectiveness of communities; improving conditions which affect quality of life and enabling people to participate fully in matters which affect them.

This strategy seeks to frame our role in coordinating actions and improving our understanding of and effectiveness in delivering the people and community development based side of community investment within neighbourhoods, as part of wider community investment and our corporate social responsibility.

By providing a framework which extends beyond those activities which are associated with, and naturally occur in, delivering our core services, the strategy covers our delivery of, or sign-posting to, specialist services and working jointly with statutory and other partners to add value to the investment into neighbourhoods.

The *scope* of this strategy covers both communities of place and communities of interest or identity.

Communities of place (geographical) will generally be categorised with priority neighbourhoods identified based on the indices of deprivation and other profiling information. We will target and prioritise our resources to the geographical communities experiencing the highest levels of social disadvantage. Other neighbourhoods will also be targeted for different reasons such as remoteness and higher exclusion from mainstream services due to rural location and isolation, poor transport links or other factors. To maximise the impact of our limited resources we will seek to focus at least 50% of our community development activity within the priority neighbourhoods.

Communities of interest or identity are prioritised based on our resident profiling and CORE data and in consideration of those groups of residents who share a similar experience of either disadvantage or exclusion, or who have shared needs or aspirations, or common issues of interest, diversity or concern.

Communities of interest or identity include:

- our older residents
- children and young people
- people with disabilities or long term illness
- common issues relating to individualism of diversity

4. Principles and objectives

This strategy seeks to reinforce positive outcomes, which promote economic and social change and support communities, which are stronger, cohesive and engaged. The broad principles and strategic objectives shaping our community engagement and empowerment priorities are:

1. To work together with our residents, communities and other partner agencies across Cornwall to ensure a coordinated and mainstreamed approach to sustain progress and achieve positive outcomes for the quality of life for our residents
2. Ensure our social investment initiatives, resources and decisions are:
 - intelligence led and customised to fit the needs, priorities and aspirations of individual neighbourhoods
 - tailored to resident and neighbourhood profiles
 - targeted to maximise the benefit to our residents and those who are most at risk of disadvantage
 - balanced between new and existing priority neighbourhoods and build upon existing projects, networks and partnerships
3. Provide outcome evidence based assessments to ensure our community development activities represent good value for money and add community value
4. Encourage, support and enable residents and communities so they are empowered to contribute to the future of their neighbourhoods
5. Develop opportunities and initiatives which promote environmental responsibilities among staff and residents and assist in creating a more sustainable environment
6. To promote the development and sustainment of cohesive communities through engagement with residents at a local level to achieve:
 - a common vision and sense of belonging
 - the valuing of diversity

- strong and positive relationships between people of different backgrounds and circumstances which builds respect
 - integration within and across communities
7. Promote access for residents to local training and employment opportunities and initiate projects to address issues of financial inclusion
 8. Build capacity at a neighbourhood level which benefits the local community and can also contribute to our resident involvement in governance and support our resident involvement strategy
 9. Widen representation of actively engaged residents at a neighbourhood level, which reflects our resident profile and local demographics

5. Management and implementation

In order to ensure the benefits of engagement and empowerment at a neighbourhood level are fully realised the arrangements and responsibilities for the implementation of this strategy is identified and set out in this section.

Responsibilities

5.1 The board will:

- lead the Association by example, promoting progress in this area of work
- make the principle of involvement and community development a key strategic objective
- make resources available to put this strategy into action

5.2 The senior management team will:

- fulfill a strategic and enabling role, overseeing the day to day implementation of the strategy
- set actions plans which achieve the objectives
- facilitate the embedding of an involvement and empowerment culture, overseeing and monitoring systems for effective engagement at a local level

5.3 Day to day responsibility will:

- be down to the dedicated resident involvement and community development team and customer facing front-line staff from across the Association

- be co-ordinated and delivered by the involvement manager, who will promote the objectives with staff, partners, contractors and other stakeholders
- be supported by a ring-fenced annual budget

5.4 Residents, service users and customers:

- are key to making this strategy and its objectives deliverable
- need to be actively involved in all we do
- should make a commitment to their own neighbourhoods
- are encouraged to tell us when we are going wrong and how we could improve

Monitoring, measuring and reviewing success

Residents and other stakeholders get involved and provide feedback on services so that we can improve services and better understand local priorities. Involvement at a neighbourhood level increases our accountability to our residents and the communities in which we work. It is important that we measure results and the impact of our local engagement and social investment activity and what has been achieved and at what cost, so that we ensure value for money approaches and focus on outcomes rather than processes.

Each year we will, in conjunction with our residents, review our key involvement activity and carry out an impact assessment, which will give us an overall picture of how involving residents and communities has added value and helped us to improve services and influence outcomes.

We will also learn from these reviews about the best way to involve our customers and communities and which approach offers greater value for money and results and will ensure it remains flexible enough to meet the changing needs of local communities.

We want to deliver a high quality service from the involvement team, which is accountable to our residents and the wider community and will develop suitable performance indicators in this area.