



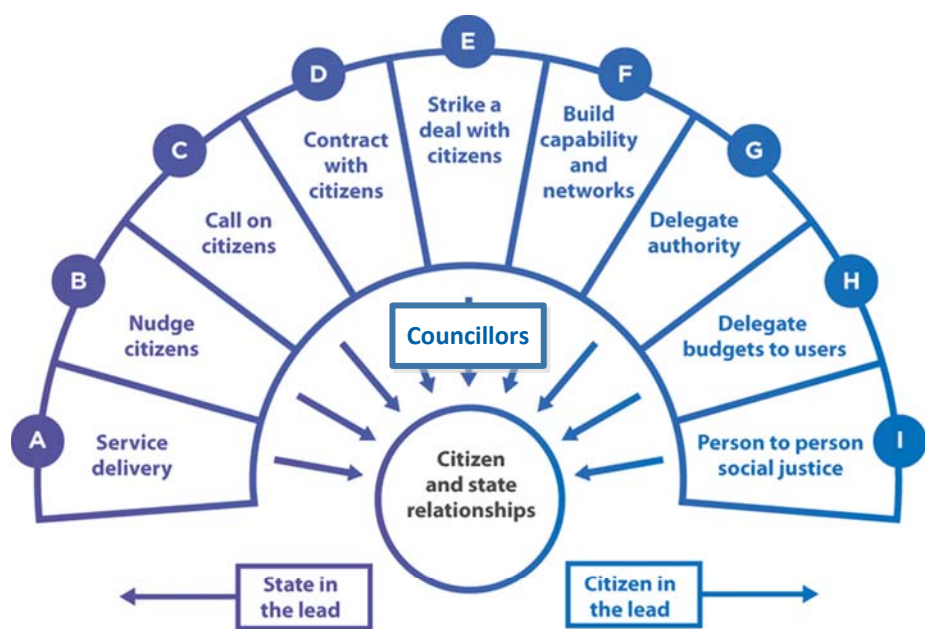
Kirklees Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group – Wednesday 18 July 2018

Developing a Citizen Engagement Framework

1. Background and Context

As part of its work the Commission explored in detail the changing relationship between the citizen and the local state. In so doing the Commission identified the tensions and opportunities of balancing representative and participatory democracy in a way that harnesses the strengths of both.

Their thinking and findings were strongly influenced by the diagram below which depicts the ways in which citizens and communities can (and should) expect a different relationship with the local council dependent on local circumstance and the context within different and diverse communities.



Source: Changing the Narrative: A New Conversation Between the Citizen and the State, 2016 (The Staff College). Refined by Kirklees to place councillors at the heart

As part of this work the Commission developed the notion of the Active Citizen and Council subsequently agreed the following outcome and recommendation:

Outcome: Active citizens have a stake in the place they live and are able to inform and influence the future of their community and the decisions affecting it;

Recommendation: Kirklees Council should make Active Citizenship a shared strategic priority and use this as a basis for developing a new democratic relationship between Kirklees citizens and the state. **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION**

As part of its work the Commission provided the following definition of the Active Citizen:

What is an active citizen?

An active citizen is someone who chooses to be active in the life of their community. This means doing something practical to help your neighbours or people in your network, or to improve the place where you live, work or visit. It's about doing something positive to improve other people's lives, in whatever way you can.

Being an active citizen also means taking an interest in what happens locally and having a voice. You should feel able to influence your community's future and be willing to share what you know.

Active citizens have a stake in the community in which they live. They take responsibility for their local area and know their rights. They question the way things are done and come up with ideas for making things better.

To be an active citizen, all you need is to care about the place where you are, and the people who you share it with – and you must be willing to do something to help.

There are lots of ways you can be an active citizen:

Have a voice – be part of your local democracy. Start a campaign, get to know your councillors, help to inform a decision, vote in local elections, set up an information stall, sign a petition, take part in a community meeting, be an activist, speak up for someone else, contribute to community research, give feedback, get involved.

Be part of something – connect with people who share your interests. Join a community group or start a new group, take part in a community activity, get together with neighbours to tidy your street, organise an event, discuss local issues, lend something to a local group, collaborate, make plans for the future, do something fun.

Be a councillor – stand for what you believe in. If there are things that you want to change, support or improve in your neighbourhood, you could make it happen by becoming a local councillor. No other role gives you a chance to make such a huge difference to people's quality of life in your local area.

Be a good neighbour – do something simple to help a neighbour. Fetch someone's shopping, make time to stop and say hello, take a neighbour to a community event, let people know what's happening in the area, share a leaflet about local services, check in on vulnerable neighbours in the winter, start with a small act of kindness.

Volunteer – give a little time, get a lot back. Volunteer with a local organisation, share your skills, be a charity trustee, become a school governor, be a mentor, give an hour a week to a befriending scheme, make connections with people of other ages, join a panel or committee, find the role that's right for you.

Active citizens and the relationships between them are what make our communities thrive.

NOTE: Much wider strategic work is taking place to look at the council's relationship with local communities and this will form the basis of dialogue with the Working Group at a future meeting.

The remainder of this paper is focussing on the key area of citizen engagement. The Commission discovered from a wide range of sources that the council's approach to "consulting" with its citizens and communities is no longer sustainable as an effective model. Citizens are increasingly sceptical of consultation. They believe that the process is a tick box exercise where the outcome has been decided in advance. They seek genuine engagement and dialogue which is designed in a way that takes citizens on an ongoing journey rather than picking them up and dropping them in the way that consultation is perceived as working.

The Commission, in advocating the notion of Active Citizen, acknowledged that local people are more likely to have a stake in the place that they live, work or visit if there is a more genuine approach to engagement and dialogue. This paper seeks to set out a framework for engagement which can be used as a basis for building a different dialogue with local people and create an environment where the notion of the Active Citizen can begin to develop and flourish.

This paper is therefore focussed on exploring our approach to citizen engagement, both as part of strategy development but equally as a means by which we move towards an ethos of genuine dialogue and engagement with our citizens on an ongoing basis. This will require a shift away from traditional models of consultation to one where ongoing conversations and engagement become the norm as part of a changing relationship. Councillors need to be at the forefront of such a relationship.

2. Information

In beginning to develop a different approach to citizen engagement there are a number of important considerations to be borne in mind which help to shape a different way of working and the steps we will need to take. In effect they form the emerging design principles to citizen engagement, many of which are derived from the work of the Democracy Commission:

- **Embracing local identity** – Kirklees is an administrative boundary. As such this presents challenges in the context of engaging with our citizens in a way that is meaningful and relevant to them. Our towns, villages and communities are the core strength of Kirklees – we need to recognise and harness this. They are an individual and collective strength which should be acknowledged and valued in the context of engagement. One size does not, and should not, fit all. Our approach to engagement should build outwards from communities not downwards. Understanding local identity will be key to making this happen;
- **Treating people as citizens not customers** – Our approach to engagement must be based around the narrative of the citizen not the customer or client. In aspiring to the notion of the Active Citizen it is dependent on the development of

relationships and dialogue as opposed to a transactional one based on traditional models of service delivery. Engagement in this context will facilitate active citizens and facilitate a shift in their expectations of the Council;

- **Co-producing and changing behaviour** – Our engagement with citizens must be a means by which we develop a wider stake for them in civic society. Consulting on pre-determined options will not create an environment where citizens change their expectations and behaviours or willingly work with us to collectively problem solve. Genuine engagement that takes citizens on a journey should create an environment where they develop a wider understanding and are better placed to take ownership where that is the best approach;
- **Placing Councillors at the heart** – Our approach must make a virtue of both representative and participatory democracy. Councillors should therefore be placed at the heart of engagement with the communities they represent with a view to leading that dialogue over time. Emerging outcomes from recent workshops with councillor and officers show that this is not currently happening. Consultation and engagement is taking place in electoral Wards without the knowledge or input of the local councillors;
- **Acknowledging our staff as citizens** – A significant number of our staff are residents within the borough. Many are already active citizens who have a stake in the place that they live and work. This should be a strength from which to build our approach to citizen engagement, utilising staff insight as part of how we work on a more routine basis;
- **Deploying our staff as agents for change** – Involving our staff in a different approach to citizen engagement provides an opportunity to expose them to different ways of working and aid the move towards alternative ways to design and deliver services. Our staff are “the face of the state” and as such are key change agents in a changing relationship, particularly those who work directly in communities, neighbourhoods and Wards. Moving away from traditional models of service delivery will increasingly mean placing the citizen at the heart of service re-design. This will require an officer and service culture change;
- **Utilising new and existing networks** – The council and its partners already have extensive networks from which to develop a different approach to engagement. This is a strength. Our interaction with groups, service users and a breadth of citizens who are already engaged provides a helpful starting point. Similarly there will be a plethora of on-line and off-line networks that thrive and exist independently of the council, doing great things within and across communities. Our approach to engagement must seek to tap into networks that already exist and seek to develop and nurture them where they do not. There needs to be a stronger feature on genuine digital engagement which seeks to grow the civic conversation;
- **Widening our engagement reach** – The Cross Party Working Group have already been very clear that greater emphasis must be placed on undertaking engagement in a way that extends reach beyond those citizens and organisations

who are visible and traditionally engage. This may well mean a move away from traditional approaches and see a greater emphasis on blending on-line and off-line techniques, some of which may be more resource intensive. This is an important consideration for the council;

- **Using intelligence and citizen insight** – In undertaking citizen engagement moving forward there is an expectation that the intelligence we have and hold is used in a way that informs and facilitates. It should be used as a basis for framing the dialogue not leading it to a pre-determined conclusion. Similarly our engagement should be framed in a way that generates insight with a view to developing a richer understanding of our communities, their motivations and aspirations. This will inform the relationship with the council that they expect and we would seek to develop.
- **Working in plain sight and telling stories** – If we are serious about engendering trust with our citizens our engagement with them should be open and transparent. Using the Democracy Commission methodology it is important that we develop our approach and thinking alongside our citizens and learn with them along the journey. This will demonstrate a genuine culture of engagement from the outset and will build confidence in the process as well as the outcomes and outputs. This will require bold leadership. Furthermore, a transparent way of working should incorporate an agile approach to sharing the stories from our citizens and communities in a way that shares the great things that are happening and facilitates behavioural change.

The above mentioned design principles could form the building blocks for a different model of engagement. They collectively make up the ingredients of the cultural change that would be required if we are serious about changing the relationship between the council and the citizens of Kirklees.

These design principles have been discussed with Executive Team who have endorsed them as a way forward. Some discreet place-based pilot work is currently taking place to test some of these principles in a live environment. A tool called the [Place Standard](#) is being used as a mechanism for engaging in a different way, based on these design principles. This will be evaluated and reported back to Executive Team and the Cross Party Working Group.

3. Recommendation

The Cross Party Working Group is asked to:

- Consider and comment on the draft design principles that will shape the Citizen Engagement Framework for the Council moving forward;
- Agree to receive the outcomes of the Place Standard pilot once completed.

Report produced by Carl Whistlecraft, Head of Democracy in consultation with the wider Programme Team.