

## AGENDA ITEM NO. 6

**REPORT TO:** Halton Strategic Partnership Board

**DATE:** 18 May 2005

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Local Authority Chief Executive

**SUBJECT:** Community Engagement

### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

Community engagement forms an essential part of everything the public sector does. Increasingly, it is an evermore-important part of policy directives from Central Government. The purpose of this report is to update the Board on the work in progress to develop a new community engagement strategy for the borough

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS: That the Board note the process now in train.

### 3. BACKGROUND

Engagement with communities is a vital part of everything that public and third sector agencies do. It is about involving people in addressing the issues that affect their lives, their homes, and their communities. On the whole Halton can take some pride in the volume and quality of engagement that takes place on the ground. However, the issue is so important that no matter how good the practice it can always be made better. The Community Strategy, best value performance frameworks, modern governance and the civil renewal agenda all highlight the need for a focus on communities and the users of services.

The Halton Strategic Partnership has committed itself to sharpening up engagement in the borough. In the autumn of 2004 the Board endorsed a proposal to develop a new community engagement strategy for Halton. Following initial consultation and discussion with partners a process for taking this forward has now been put in place. The intention is to work with all stakeholders in the borough to develop three “products” – a new engagement strategy and plan for its implementation; a toolkit of advice and best practice for practitioners; and a protocol for managing/sharing the results of participation processes.

To begin the process a key stakeholders event was held on the 5 April 2005. This was attended by 35 people from across the partnership. The aim of the event was to map the current situation, identify the issues that need to be addressed, and reach a consensus on how to carry the process forward. The suggested progression from here is as follows:

April/May	Stakeholders network/consult on engagement practice using template followed at stakeholder event.
May 17	Further stakeholder event to gather and collate information and explore the main pillars of a strategy.
June	Initial draft of strategy/toolkit produced
June 28	Stakeholder meeting to agree draft
July	Halton Strategic Partnership Board asked to endorse draft for consultation
August/September	Consultation process on draft products
September	Halton Strategic Partnership Board formally adopt strategy

The rationale for this process has two key elements. Firstly, that a worthwhile engagement strategy can only be produced through a process that is itself highly participative. Secondly, that the process must be both deep and wide. That is, a core group of stakeholders will be deeply involved in the process throughout. Through them a much wider range of people will have the opportunity to be involved.

Alongside the stakeholder process there are a number of ongoing key tasks to help towards drafting a strategy i.e. examining best practice in other areas of the country, consulting on key policies and emerging developments, including requirements placed on each organisation for community engagement. A toolkit of good practice and protocols to go alongside the strategy document will also be produced. This will be invaluable for many partners.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

An effective process needs to be developed in an open and transparent process that is seen to have involved all the relevant stakeholders in the Borough. The strategy will not be the end in itself, but the means to an end. It will form part of a process to demonstrate that the partnership is more customer facing and transparent in all that it does.

A number of benefits can be expected to accrue from this approach:

- Greater involvement and participation of users in the design and delivery of services maximising their effectiveness and the efficient use of resources
- Enhanced community leadership role for partnership members through more effective use of consultation resources and techniques

- Greater level of shared intelligence and better understanding of cross-cutting issues, leading to better decision making, better coordination of services and, efficiency savings.
- Improved communication in disseminating key messages on the work and successes of partners and in receiving feedback about services and proposals.
- Better responding to the diversity and equality agenda by working most appropriately with communities of interest, locality or identity.