

NEA framework

for an ideal empowering authority





improvement and development agency

Many thanks to:

The Network of Empowering Authorities (**NEA**)
It would not have been possible to produce this NEA framework without the commitment and input of many stakeholders, including the 18 NEA authorities themselves, CLG, the RIEPS, Government Offices and the Audit Commission.

The IDeA is grateful to the many people who have committed time and energy to this project.

Introduction

This Framework is based on the work of the Network of Empowering Authorities (**NEA**), initially at an event held in October 2008.

The **NEA** is a network of 18 councils from across the country, chosen by Government to help champion community empowerment and it is supported by the Improvement and Development Agency.

The Framework also draws widely on other research, evidence and assessment frameworks including the Comprehensive Area Assessment and the ECHO framework developed by changes, which can be found at:

www.changesuk.net

It has been developed with the involvement of other partners including the Audit Commission, Communities and Local Government, Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships, Regional Empowerment Partnerships and Government Offices.

Why community empowerment?

There are a number of current national drivers encouraging councils and partnerships to empower their communities, including the new Duty to Involve which comes into force on 1st April 2009. Regardless of drivers, Community Engagement and Empowerment is important because it can help you deliver:

stronger communities – resilient communities with strong social networks and active citizens taking responsibility for their own well-being

better services – services informed and influenced by communities so that they meet needs effectively and efficiently

vibrant democracy – representative democracy improved through active participation.

You can find out more about Community Empowerment on the IDeA website www.idea.gov.uk/engagement

How to use the framework

The Framework provides a benchmark for an Ideal Authority – something to aspire to. Most councils and partnerships will only meet some of the success factors, and can use the Framework as a tool to support further development. It consists of 5 inter-linked pillars and 8 high-level success factors that between them describe a high performing empowering authority. The 5 pillars are themes for implementation, providing an approach to development and change, and each one is designed to stand alone as well as to be part of the whole framework. The key success factors cut across the pillars, and are described in more detail in the main table. There are a series of diagnostic questions for self-assessment against the detailed success factors. Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), councils and other public or third sector agencies can use the Framework to identify areas for improvement.

Authorities that have assessed their empowerment work using the Framework will be able to provide it as evidence for relevant National Indicator targets, especially NI 4, and for their Comprehensive Area Assessment. The Framework also links closely to the Duty to Involve – meeting the Framework will help you to meet the new Duty.

The Appendix 1 contains definitions of relevant terms. Please refer to it to understand meanings in the Framework.



Summary of key elements of framework

Pillars for community empowerment

Mainstreaming: culture change in councils and partnerships

changing the way organisations work and are structured in order to make them responsive to communities.

Working with communities, neighbourhoods and localities

how agencies and communities can work together to identify priority outcomes and address them.

The role of members in community empowerment

members as community leaders, helping communities and agencies to work together, and strengthening democratic accountability.

Building the evidence and business case for community empowerment

evidencing that community empowerment delivers efficient and effective services and stronger, more democratic communities.

Integrating community empowerment with community cohesion, equalities and human rights

community empowerment delivers cohesive and inclusive communities and addresses inequalities.

Key success factors

Clear Leadership. There is strong leadership for Community Empowerment from the LSP and Council.

Effective Partnership. Partners are working together to empower communities.

Fully integrated. The Council and LSP partners have put Community Empowerment and community influence at the heart of their organisation.

Service improvement. Empowered communities are driving service improvement.

Strong communities. There are strong, active, cohesive, co-operative and engaged communities and a strong and supported Voluntary and Community Sector.

Strong relationships. Communities are working together with agencies through strong relationships based on trust.

Good Information. There is excellent shared knowledge and communication.

Strong Democracy. There is a clear central role for Members as Community Leaders and strong local democracy.

Mainstreaming: culture change in councils and partnerships.

Changing the way organisations work and are structured in order to make them responsive to communities

Key Factors

Detailed success factors

Clear Leadership

- there is strong visible political and senior management leadership and a clear community empowerment vision, to make it happen
- the LSP is driving the agenda and is involving the community to develop the Sustainable Community Strategy and deliver LAA priority outcomes
- there is an agreed common understanding of what Community Empowerment is and why it is important.

Effective Partnership

- the Council and LSP partners use and share good up-to-date information from and about local communities, to inform strategic planning
- the council services and LSP partners join together to share learning and to work in a coordinated way with their communities, silo-working is minimised, and there is little duplication
- partners work together to deliver efficiencies in Community Empowerment activity (e.g. joint engagement database, pooled or aligned budgets, common performance management information or systems etc)
- there is strong community and Third Sector involvement at all levels of partnership working, facilitated by well-supported and effective infrastructure organisation/s.

Fully integrated

- there is a culture of empowering communities throughout agencies. The council and LSP partners have changed their work practices across their organisation in order to engage effectively with communities, and new working patterns and behaviours are embedded
- community empowerment is at the heart of decision-making, informing strategies, policies, delivery plans and commissioning processes with clear and understood definitions of what it means
- communities are involved in defining priority outcomes, and the needs and aspirations of citizens are known and acted on
- Community Empowerment policies and strategies are known and understood by all staff
- staff and councillors are valued, and supported to develop relevant competencies for empowerment, and encouraged to work with communities
- frontline staff are empowered to take action to deliver community defined outcomes, and have channels to feed back information into their organisation
- there are dedicated staff with appropriate skills to support the delivery of community empowerment
- the council and partners manage risks and change (including structural change) in relation to community empowerment whilst encouraging learning and innovation to flourish.

Diagnostic questions

- Who champions community empowerment and how?
 - Can you demonstrate active buy-in by political and officer leaders and LSP partners?
 - Does your LSP have a comprehensive community engagement strategy, which sets out a clear vision and definitions, and which explains how you will inform, consult, involve and empower communities?
 - Do you have a work programme to take this forward?
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- Do your Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA reflect priorities established by the community and community information?
 - Is community empowerment activity contributing to delivering your LAA outcomes?
 - How do you plan, coordinate and undertake community engagement activity as LSP partners and allocate resources to avoid duplication?
 - Are any partner budgets / resources pooled or aligned?
 - How are you sharing ideas and knowledge between partners?
 - Can you evidence that the Compact informs your partnership working?
-
- What evidence can you provide that the culture of your LSP/organisation, your staff and your services is changing?
 - How do you demonstrate that commissioning delivers community empowerment in a cohesive and inclusive way?
 - How do your service plans reflect and capture community needs and priorities and how do you evidence the involvement of communities? What has the impact been on Planning, Children and Young People, and Adult Social Care services?
 - How are you encouraging and managing innovation in your community involvement activities?
 - How are staff skills, competencies and confidence at working with communities increasing, and how are you supporting and monitoring this?
 - Do you have sustainably funded staff dedicated to community engagement and empowerment? What is their impact?

Working with communities, neighbourhoods and localities

How agencies and communities can work together to identify priority outcomes and address them.

Key Factors

Detailed success factors

Strong relationships

- councils and LSP partners use common structures, processes and boundaries through which communities can engage at local, area and strategic level, about things that matter and in ways that make sense to them
 - there are plenty of relevant and accessible events and a range of engagement activities where people can influence decisions or become actively involved in shaping and improving their area
 - there is trust between communities, third sector organisations and agencies, because they have built relationships, they understand each other's perspectives and differences, they have agreed acceptable behaviours, and their expectations are managed
 - agencies understand that communities have different needs, that one-size does not fit all, and some communities will require more development support than others
 - agencies and communities work together to address problems and make decisions. These processes are timely, dynamic, creative and inclusive, and not just passive responses to consultation
 - the council, partners and communities are learning from good and bad experiences of community empowerment and through trying out new approaches.
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- the community drive bottom-up community empowerment, authorities get involved with community concerns and actions, as well as the other way round – there is mutual engagement
 - communities are strong, active, co-operative and engaged. People work together to improve their area, there are strong social networks and neighbourly contact is valued
 - an increasing and diverse number of residents, including older people and children & young people, are increasing their skills, knowledge and confidence to actively participate and volunteer in their community. They feel that their views matter and are listened to
 - there is proactive community capacity building, based on community development practice that builds skills, community organisations and networks, involvement and equality
 - there is a thriving and well-supported Voluntary and Community Sector, including infrastructure and anchor organisations, and social enterprises, that empowers communities.

Diagnostic questions

- Are your structures accountable to communities? How do you know if communities value them? What outcomes do they deliver?
 - How do you know if trust in the council and partner agencies is increasing?
 - How do you know if people feel they have an increasing sense of influence over local decisions?
 - How well are partners participating in your neighbourhood or locality arrangements?
 - How have successful and unsuccessful initiatives informed your practise?
 - What has happened and what has changed as a result of community involvement? Do communities know this and do you credit their input?
-
- In what ways are communities setting the agenda for their involvement?
 - Can you demonstrate increased community action, and a greater sense of community?
 - Can you demonstrate that citizens have access to information and know how to challenge, complain to and influence the council and partners?
 - How are you helping to build the capacity of your communities to engage? How is this work funded?
 - In what ways are Third Sector organisations contributing to empowering communities?
 - Are partners paying due regard to the financial and other resource implications for the Third Sector?
 - Is involvement and representation increasing?

Working with communities, neighbourhoods and localities

How agencies and communities can work together to identify priority outcomes and address them.

Key Factors

Detailed success factors

Good Information

- there is a good understanding of local communities, based on detailed community profiles that measure gaps in outcomes, and informed by residents, members and frontline staff
 - local information collection and giving is co-ordinated between partners
 - there is excellent, clear communication between communities and agencies, using a range of mechanisms including IT
 - people know about the range of opportunities to engage and are encouraged to take them up
 - communities receive feedback on the impact of their involvement and know what has changed as a result and what hasn't changed and why.
-
- community information and community involvement is improving services
 - neighbourhood management principles are embedded and address deprivation and gaps in outcomes, with services bending to meet local needs
 - communities actively participate in producing and delivering local area, parish or neighbourhood plans, based on their priorities or community-led. Communities are assessing whether priority outcomes for the area have been delivered
 - communities co-design policies and services, are involved in budget decisions and co-produce aspects of services
 - there is community ownership of assets.

Diagnostic questions

- How have you used community information and issues arising from engagement activities to help identify priorities?
 - How is Member's knowledge of their ward used to inform community engagement?
 - How do you communicate with your communities and how do you match communication methods to your targeted communities?
 - How do you feed back to communities on the impact of their involvement and on whether outcomes have been delivered?
-
- How have neighbourhood/local services improved as a result of community involvement? What is the evidence and what are the outcomes?
 - How do you ensure that communities of interest influence services?
 - If you have local area plans, how were priorities set? How are they being implemented and what role is the community playing? Are they informing council and partner plans?
 - Have you developed any neighbourhood or parish charters? What impact have they has?
 - Do you have evidence that communities are empowered to take more control over services, budgets, assets, and decisions?

The role of members in community empowerment

Members as a community leaders, helping communities and agencies to work together, and strengthening democratic accountability

Key Factors

Detailed success factors

Clear Leadership

- Members are involved in developing and implementing the community empowerment vision
- there is cross-party support for community empowerment, ensuring sustainability
- Members are actively involved in scrutinising community engagement and empowerment initiatives and governance arrangements, with input from communities, to drive improvement
- Members work with other councillors across local government tiers to engage with communities in Districts and Parishes (where relevant).

Strong Democracy

- Frontline Members' Community Empowerment role is clearly defined and understood. There is clear understanding that participative democracy can strengthen representative democracy
- Ward Members are actively involved in local engagement structures and activities, facilitate dialogue between residents, the council and partners, and make use of the 'call for action'
- there is some devolution of decisions and budgets to enable Members to play an active role in local decisions, with strong accountability to local residents
- there is a more vibrant local democracy with communities keen to discuss issues with Members and others. Community involvement encourages more people to take on governance roles and stand for office. Members and Officers proactively promote democracy, raising understanding and awareness amongst citizens and young people.

Strong relationships

- councillors work with the community sector to build strong working relationships. Citizens know who their local councillors are
- Members are adequately resourced to undertake their community empowerment role and have time to engage with their communities, because the balance of council work is manageable. Officers help broker relationships between elected Members and communities.
- a large proportion of Members have a high level of community engagement skills
- Members carry into the council the views of the public and explain the decisions of the council to the public. Their knowledge of their ward is positively valued by the council, partners and communities
- Member induction and ongoing development programmes have a strong community empowerment theme and are accredited.

Diagnostic questions

- How effectively are elected members leading and supporting the delivery of the empowerment agenda? Do all Members get involved?
 - How are Members scrutinising community engagement and empowerment strategies and delivery and what is the impact? Are they involving the community in scrutiny?
 - How well are Members working together across local government tiers (where relevant).
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- How well is Member's community empowerment role defined and understood, by Members themselves, by officers, by partners and by communities?
 - Has there been any devolution of decisions or budgets to localities, and if so, what role do Members play? Do they facilitate communities to influence decisions? Is there accountability to communities?
 - How are the council and Members actively promoting democracy?
 - Does the profile of your Members reflect that of your local population?
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- What is the profile and relationship of Members with community organisations? Do they value each other?
 - Has the council balanced the workload of Members, recognising the importance of their role as community champions?
 - What support and resources do Members have for their role as community leaders?
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- How do councillors feed community issues back to the council and strategic partners and how are these issues addressed?
 - What Member development programmes do you have specifically targeted to skills in community empowerment and what is the take-up?
 - Do individual Members have skills development plans which include community empowerment?
 - How do Members share community engagement skills with colleagues?

Building the evidence and business case for community empowerment

Evidencing that community empowerment delivers efficient and effective services and stronger, more democratic communities

Key Factors

Detailed success factors

Clear Leadership

- all stakeholders are clear of the benefits of community empowerment and about what it can deliver
- leaders are using evidence to drive improvement.

Effective Partnership

- partners work together to share indicator definitions, collect data in comparable ways, e.g. using coterminous boundaries, and then share it
- the council and partners can demonstrate service improvements that have resulted from engaging with communities, and can show how engagement is helping to deliver LAA priority outcomes and delivery plans
- Communities and Third Sector organisations are involved in evaluating the effectiveness of community engagement processes and outcomes.

Fully integrated

- there is a strong culture of evaluation and evidence is used to improve practice. Evaluation takes note of small changes and softer outcomes, as indicators of direction of travel
 - cost benefit analysis of community engagement activity is undertaken where appropriate.
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- there is good baseline of qualitative and quantitative data, including national indicators and bottom-up information, which is then tracked over time to evidence the impact of community involvement activity and whether outcomes are achieved
 - there is an agreed basket of indicators to measure community empowerment activity e.g. levels of involvement and voter turnout.

Diagnostic questions

- Have all stakeholders agreed expected outcomes from Community Empowerment?
 - Who sees the evidence and what do they do with it?
-
- What protocols do you have in place for collecting and sharing information between partners, and with communities?
 - Can you evidence impact on partnership outcomes as a result of community engagement activity?
 - Are third sector organisations involved in giving feedback to provide evaluation of the quality of engagement?
 - How do you feed back to communities with evidence of the impact of their involvement?
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- Can you demonstrate cost?
 - Can you demonstrate benefit?
 - Can you demonstrate application of learning?
 - Can you evidence improved resident satisfaction because of community involvement?
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- How do you use data/indicators and information to show impact and to evaluate and improve practice?
 - Does everyone know what evidence to collect and are they collecting it consistently?

Integrating community empowerment with community cohesion, equalities and human rights

Community empowerment delivers cohesive and inclusive communities and addresses inequalities

Key Factors

Detailed success factors

Clear Leadership

- there is strong leadership for the principles of cohesion, equality, 'visible fairness' and social justice.

Fully integrated

- Community Cohesion, Equalities and Human Rights form a 'golden thread' through all work with communities, from the Sustainable Community Strategy right down to sub-ward level.

Strong relationships

- there is a range of co-ordinated specific mechanisms for involving diverse communities, which complement neighbourhood or area-based mechanisms. There is a facilitative approach that does not overburden them
- there is increased involvement of, and influence by diverse communities, including new communities and vulnerable and marginalized groups
- the council and partners support a range of community events and activities which involve people who don't normally come together, increasing awareness, understanding and positive interaction
- agencies are proactive in understanding and dealing constructively with community tensions and competing demands, and they challenge stereotyping within and between communities.

Strong Communities

- the council and partners invest in community development support and outreach to support Voluntary and Community groups that are led by or represent vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized groups. These groups are supported to influence decisions, and are confident to challenge and discuss difficult issues
- diverse communities are increasing their access to and take-up of services.
- there is good, up-to-date information about diverse communities, including new communities and differentiated data on their levels of involvement
- there is good targeted communication with diverse communities, including things such as welcome packs, service information and information on how to get involved.

Diagnostic questions

- How effectively is your LSP driving the empowerment agenda in a way that is inclusive?
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- What is the link between your community engagement, cohesion and equality strategies?
 - How have you tailored your priority outcomes and services to different communities as a result of engagement?
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- How do you ensure, and evidence, that your mechanisms for community engagement are inclusive?
 - What examples can you give of community engagement activities that have promoted cohesion and equality?
 - How have communities been involved in defining priorities for tackling inequality and disadvantage within the area?
 - What mechanism do you have to deal with tensions between communities?
 - Could you demonstrate that you have trust when dealing with difficult situations / decisions?
 - How are you getting people from different backgrounds to interact, to integrate new residents and to build a local sense of belonging?
-
- How cohesive are local communities? How can you evidence this?
 - Do you have evidence that you have acted on the priority issues of equalities group to deliver equitable outcomes?
 - How can you demonstrate that you have made a difference in reducing inequalities between different groups through effective community engagement and empowerment?
-
- What mechanisms do you have in place to recognise new communities and respond effectively?
 - How do you use information about your diverse communities to improve services?
 - How do you communicate effectively with these communities?

Appendix 1

Some useful definitions

Communities is a term used to describe communities of place, communities of identity and communities of interest.

Community cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration, which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another.

Community development is the process of building people's skills and ability to act together on their common priorities usually through the development of independent community organisations and networks, and with the support of community development workers within statutory or third sector agencies.

Community empowerment is the outcome of engagement and other activities. Power, influence and responsibility is shifted away from existing centres of power and into the hands of communities and individual citizens.

Community engagement is the action that agencies take to enable them to consult, involve, listen and respond to communities through ongoing relationships.

Consultation is the process by which agencies seek advice, information and opinions about strategies, policies and services. The existing decision makers take this into account when they make decisions. This includes many familiar activities such as surveys, research projects, public meetings, user and resident forums.

Involvement as defined in the Duty to Involve is an over-arching term that covers providing information to, consulting with and involving citizens in active ways. This can include providing people with opportunities to influence or directly participate in decision making; to provide feedback on decisions, services, policies and outcomes; to co-design/work with authorities in designing policies and services; to co-produce/carry out some aspects of services themselves; and to work with the authority in assessing services.

Neighbourhood management is a process for addressing disadvantaged neighbourhoods by improving and joining up local services and making them more responsive to local needs. Usually a neighbourhood manager works with agencies and communities, using community information to improve neighbourhood services and reduce the gap in outcomes in deprived areas.

Participation is when citizens and communities are involved in issues that affect their lives. They play an active part in generating ideas as well as making the decisions alongside public sector partners. For instance: participative budgeting or participative planning.

Co-production is when communities or individual residents active participants rather than passive recipients. They are supported to use the skills, networks and experience they have to improve local outcomes, improve local services, or to help solve a problem. Many local problems can only be solved by supporting and using communities' own resources.

Appendix 2 More about the network of empowering authorities

The NEA is a network of 18 councils from across the country, chosen by the Government to help champion community empowerment and supported by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA).

The 2-year NEA programme aims to:

- support the community empowerment work of the 18 authorities
- push the boundaries of existing practice in community empowerment
- share the good practice and learning with other local authorities.

Region	Organisation
North West	Salford City Council
	Cumbria County Council
North East	North Tyneside Council
	Newcastle City Council
Yorkshire and the Humber	East Riding of Yorkshire Council
	Sheffield City Council
West Midlands	Birmingham City Council
	Wolverhampton City Council
East Midlands	Nottingham City Council
	High Peak District Council
East of England	Ipswich Borough Council
	Great Yarmouth Borough Council
London	London Borough of Southwark
	London Borough of Lewisham
South East	Brighton and Hove City Council
	Portsmouth City Council
South West	Plymouth City Council
	Wiltshire County Council

IDeA

Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5LG

telephone 020 7296 6600

facsimile 020 7296 6666

email info@idea.gov.uk

www.idea.gov.uk



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Local Government Association

The Local Government Association is the national voice for more than 400 local authorities in England and Wales. The LGA group comprises the LGA and five partner organisations which work together to support, promote and improve local government.

