

## Framework for an ideal empowering authority

### Why community engagement / empowerment?

There are a number of current national drivers encouraging councils and partnerships to empower their communities including the National Standards for Community Engagement. Regardless of drivers, community engagement and empowerment is important because it can help 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](http://www.idea.gov.uk/engagement)

### How to use the framework:

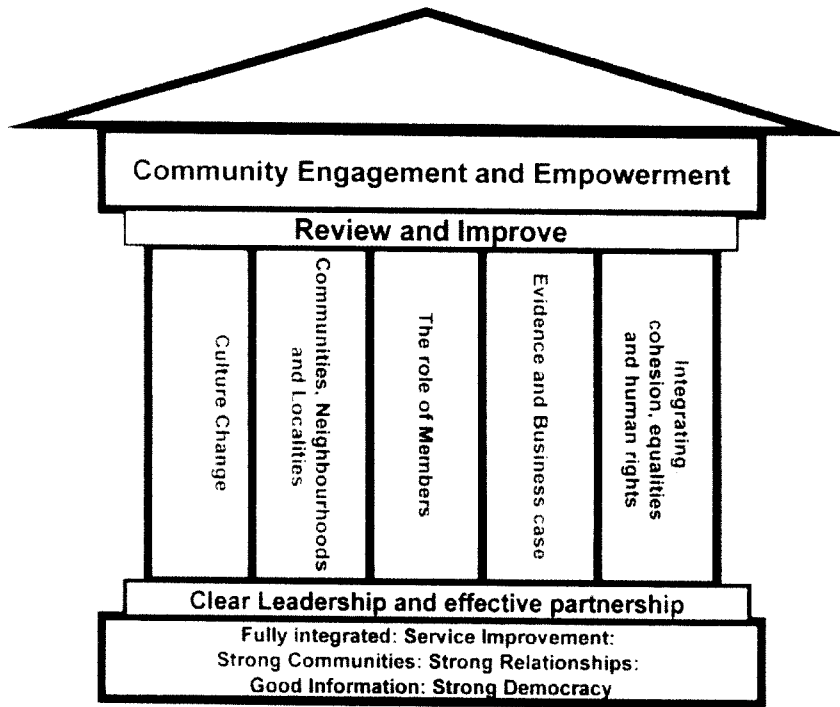
The framework provides a benchmark for an Ideal Authority – something to aspire to. Most councils and partnerships will only meet some of the success factors, and can use the framework as a tool to support further development.

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. Community Planning Partnerships (CPP) councils and other public or third sector agencies can use the framework to identify areas for improvement.

**Appendix a** contains definitions of relevant terms. Please refer to it to understand meanings in the framework.



## Key elements of the framework

### Pillars for Community Empowerment

**Mainstreaming, culture change in**

**councils and partnerships**  
Changing the way organisations work and organisational structure 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 CPP.

**Effective Partnership.** Partners are working together to empower communities.

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

**Service improvement.** Empowered communities are driving service improvement.

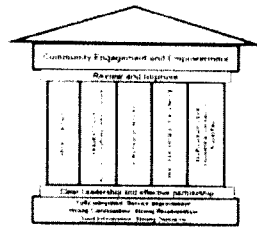
**Strong communities.** There are strong, active, cohesive, co-operative and engaged communities and a strong and supported Voluntary and Community Sector.

**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

## Summary of key elements of the framework.



### Pillar

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

#### Clear Leadership

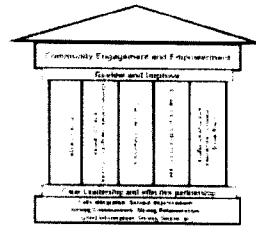
- there is strong visible political and senior management leadership and a clear community empowerment vision, to make it happen
- the CPP is driving the agenda and is involving the community to develop the Single Outcome Agreement
- there is an agreed common understanding of what Community Empowerment is and why it is important

#### Effective Partnership

- the CP partners use and share good up-to-date information from and about local communities, to inform strategic planning
- the CP 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 CP 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



## Pillar

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

### Strong relationships

- councils and CP 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

### Strong communities

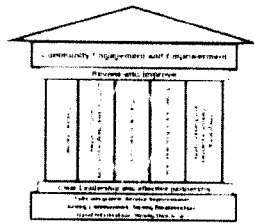
- the community drive bottom-up community empowerment, authorities get involved with community concerns and actions, as well as the other way round – there is mutual engagement
- communities are strong, active, co-operative and engaged, people work together to improve their area, there are strong social 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

#### **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

#### **Strong communities**

- 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, community 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



## Pillar

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

### Clear Leadership

- Members are involved in developing and implementing community engagement
- 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 to engage with communities

### Strong Democracy

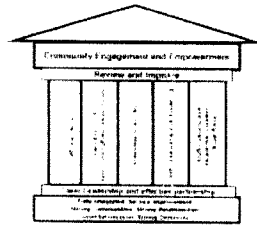
- *Frontline:* Members' Community Empowerment role is clearly defined and understood, there is clear understanding that participative democracy can strengthen representative democracy
- Ward Members are actively involved in local engagement structures and activities, facilitate dialogue between residents, 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

### Fully integrated

- 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.



## Pillar

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

### 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

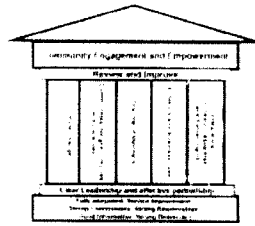
- partners work together to share indicator definitions, collect data in comparable ways, e.g. using coterminous boundaries, and then share it
- the council and partners can demonstrate service improvements that have resulted from engaging with communities, and can show how engagement is helping to deliver TPP 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

### Good information

- 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



## Pillar

### 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 Single Outcome Agreement right down to 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

### Good Information

- 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