

Engagement Strategy

for Blaenau Gwent

2013 - 2017



BWRDD GWASANAETH LLEOL
Blaenau Gwent
LOCAL SERVICE BOARD

“ Blaenau Gwent - a better
place to live, work and visit ”

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An Engagement Strategy for Blaenau Gwent

Foreword

I am very pleased to present the Blaenau Gwent Local Service Board (LSB) Engagement Strategy for 2013-17. The strategy has been developed by a variety of partnership professionals who work with/for the citizens of Blaenau Gwent; more importantly children, young people, adults and older people have been involved in the development of this strategy.

LSBs bring together leaders of local public sector and third sector organisations to take collective action to ensure that public services are effective and citizen focussed.

The Blaenau Gwent LSB is committed to making Blaenau Gwent a place where all its citizens are treated as valued members of the community, whose voices are heard and needs considered across the range of policy making.

This strategy sets out a clear vision that will enable professionals gain a more coherent, consistent methodology to engagement, leading to better outcomes for our citizens and the communities they live in.

Meaningful citizen engagement can help to:

- Create safe, strong, cohesive and desirable communities;
- build social capital and promote community spirit and pride;
- encourage people to take an active role in their communities.

The strategy has been formally adopted by the LSB and in so doing all partner agencies are committed to its implementation, both in terms of people and finance, to ensure we meet the targets we have set. The LSB will monitor its progress in implementing this strategy over the next 4 years.

Cllr. Steve Thomas

Chair, Blaenau Gwent Local Service Board

VISION

In Blaenau Gwent, all citizens will have the opportunity to participate in decisions, which affect their lives. They will have access to services that meet their needs, and the opportunity to shape how these services are planned and delivered.

Background and policy context

The Welsh Government statutory guidance Shared Purpose: Shared Delivery on integrating partnerships and plans specifies that each Local Service Board (LSB) should develop an enabling strategy for engagement, which should form part of the Single Integrated Plan. The guidance outlines that the Welsh approach to public service reform is premised on the ‘citizen voice’ as a driver for service improvement, and that the single integrated plan should set out how partners collaboratively engage with people and communities using a joined-up and consistent approach, with a very clear focus on how this will best support improvement in services, and the experience people have using the services.

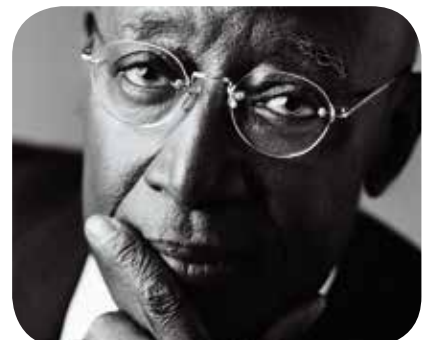
Through effective engagement, citizens are provided with opportunities to help improve their understanding on a range of issues, which helps in the design of services and policies from the outset. This approach ensures that our policies and services are citizen-centred and based on robust evidence of need, therefore leading to better value for money and improved community outcomes.

Making engagement effective empowers local democracy and promotes a more vibrant community, resulting in positive outcomes for citizens. For example, citizens will be able to build and develop skills, improve confidence levels and increase awareness of how decisions are made. Fundamentally, citizens will directly benefit from new and improved services that their views helped to shape. Whilst we recognise not all citizens have to be involved or want to be involved, the LSB will look to ensure that the choice to do so is available and at the right level that meets the individual’s needs. In theory, there are no limits to the level of engagement for our citizens and we will actively encourage them to get involved.

The Blaenau Gwent LSB is committed to the development of engagement mechanisms and initiatives that actively look to involve people in developing and implementing strategies and plans, and influence, shape and improve service provision. Examples to date include:

- The Living in Blaenau Gwent Survey 2009, which was a local area survey that joined up citizen engagement and surveys of citizen perceptions and satisfaction across partners, and created a shared information base for strategic planning. Most notably seen in the Community Strategy Making a difference – The big 20 year plan for Blaenau Gwent 2010 to 2030.

- Endorsement and implementation of the Blaenau Gwent Citizen Panel in 2012, which is a panel of 1,000 residents of Blaenau Gwent who have volunteered to act as the voice of all residents in the area, by giving their opinion on important issues such as identifying local priorities, providing feedback on service provision; and helping shape policies and plans.
- Endorsement and implementation of the Blaenau Gwent Engagement Portal. This is a web-based engagement and consultation database system that allows Blaenau Gwent LSB partners to publicise their consultation and engagement activities. It allows members of the public and key stakeholders to browse consultation and engagement activities, provide feedback or take part electronically, and view the overall feedback and results. Engagement tools and surveys undertaken by partners will also be included in the portal.
- Ongoing support for established engagement mechanisms and borough wide forums such as School Councils, Youth Forums, Children’s Grand Council, Access for All Forum, 50+ Network, Tenants & Residents Associations, Voluntary Sector Networks, Crime Prevention Panels and the Aneurin Bevan Community Health Council to name just a few.



What do we mean by engagement?

Engagement is a general term used to describe any process that involves contact with the public or with stakeholders. Engagement is about providing a variety of opportunities for citizens to get involved so they can actively participate in the planning, development and delivery of services. It goes further than informing and consulting citizens by seeking to enable people and communities to take an active part in influencing decision-making and service delivery. The framework for engagement will be based on the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales and the National Participation Standards for Children and Young People in Wales.

Who is the strategy for?

This strategy is for anyone who considers themselves a stakeholder in Blaenau Gwent. This includes people who live and work in Blaenau Gwent. It serves as a blueprint for public and third sector organisations and professionals to use a consistent engagement approach. It also serves as a guide for citizens and stakeholders as to what they can expect when being engaged, involved and participating with decision makers and professionals.

What is the strategy about?

Engagement of citizens and communities is vital if we are to make Blaenau Gwent a better place to live, work and visit. It is paramount that citizens and professionals let us know what they think. We will require consistent, good quality, co-ordinated, engagement by all organisations that influence and provide services in Blaenau Gwent; this includes the Blaenau Gwent Strategic Partnership, which brings together many organisations and groups that are involved in making decisions that affect the future wellbeing of the people of the borough. The voluntary, community and public sectors are all represented on the Blaenau Gwent LSB and will aim to follow the commitments set out in this strategy.

What do we want to achieve?

In developing this Engagement Strategy, we want to commit to a set of core aims that all partners can sign up to. Also we want to provide a coordinated and better planned approach to public engagement in Blaenau Gwent, delivered by key partner organisations working together. The core aims for the 2013 to 2017 Blaenau Gwent Citizen Engagement Strategy are to:

- Develop an active, partnership approach to engagement in Blaenau Gwent.
- Improve the coordination of engagement across Blaenau Gwent.
- Encourage involvement of people in engagement activities across Blaenau Gwent.

This strategic approach will also ensure that all partners' engagement activities are in line and linked with the design and delivery of the Single Integrated Plan for Blaenau Gwent 2013-2017. For example, Communities First Involvement Plans are developed to support the Cluster Action Plans for each Communities First area identified in Blaenau Gwent, which in turn are linked to Local Service Board projects and priorities

The Engagement Strategy ensures that the National Principles for Public Engagement, endorsed by the Welsh Government in March 2011, and Wales' Children & young People's Participation Standards are integrated into all engagement activity undertaken by Blaenau Gwent LSB and its partner organisations and serve as the underpinning principles of this strategy.

Engagement principles and standards

The framework for engagement will be based on the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales and the National Participation Standards for Children and Young people in Wales.

The National Principles for Public Engagement are:

- Engagement is effectively designed to make a difference
- Encourage and enable everyone affected to be involved, if they so choose
- Engagement is planned and delivered in a timely and appropriate way
- A commitment to further develop person friendly and accessible mechanisms of engagement
- Work with relevant partner organisations
- The information provided will be jargon free, appropriate and understandable
- Make it easier to take part
- Enable people to take part effectively
- Engagement is given the right to be effective
- People are told the impact of their contribution
- Learn and share lessons to improve the process of engagement

Blaenau Gwent LSB and its partners will also fulfil its obligations to ensure that Children and Young People have the opportunity to participate and are listened to. The National Participation Standards for Children in Wales, which are based on the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, will be used as a framework within which to achieve this. Additionally, 'Contribution and Participation' is one of the core strategic themes of the National Strategy for Older People in Wales. The strategy notes the need to promote positive images of ageing and ensure that the over 50's are able to participate as fully as they wish in their communities giving them a stronger sense of engagement and influence.

The National Participation Standards for Children and Young People in Wales are

- **Information** - this means:
 - Information that is easy to understand for everyone
 - Professionals working with you who know what is going on and are upfront and clear
- **Its your choice** - this means:
 - You choose if you want to get involved or not
 - You choose to work on things that are important to you
 - You choose what you do and how you do it
- **No discrimination** - this means:
 - Citizens are all different and you all have the same right to have a say about the things that matter to you. We want everyone to feel welcome and be able to get involved.
- **Respect** - this means:
 - Everyone has the chance to have a say, your opinions are important and we will respect them.
- **You get something out of It** - this means:
 - We want you to enjoy and benefit from taking part.
 - We will make sure that participating is a positive not a negative experience
- **Feedback** - this means:
 - Its really important that you know what difference you have made and how your ideas have been used
- **Improving how we work** - this means:
 - We want to learn and get better at the way we work with you
 - We will look at the way we work with you and how to improve it

Our core values

Outlined below are the general core values and commitments that all public sector organisations have agreed to follow as part of this shared strategy, which have been shaped through the continued involvement of Blaenau Gwent citizens:-

- Engagement is driven by the needs of people
- All citizens have an equal opportunity to participate
- We will adopt methods which are culturally sensitive and respectful
- Some groups will find it particularly difficult to participate within the engagement process. Appropriate methods will be used to facilitate the engagement of hard to reach groups.
- Engagement is based around a properly resourced framework which includes an effective mechanism for feedback.
- Safeguarding practices will be central to engaging with young people especially for vulnerable children and adults.
- A commitment to promoting engagement through the medium of Welsh and working with Welsh Language organisations to achieve this.
- Mechanisms will be put in place to support mainstreaming of children's rights particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child article 12.
- A commitment to further develop people friendly mechanisms to facilitate involvement in partnerships and planning.

The way forward

Stage One - Sign up to the Principals, Standards and Commitments

In order for engagement to be effective in an organisation, commitment is required at its most senior level. This is recognised by the Local Service Board and a borough wide “sign up” will take place in 2013.

Stage Two - Undertake an Engagement Self-Assessment

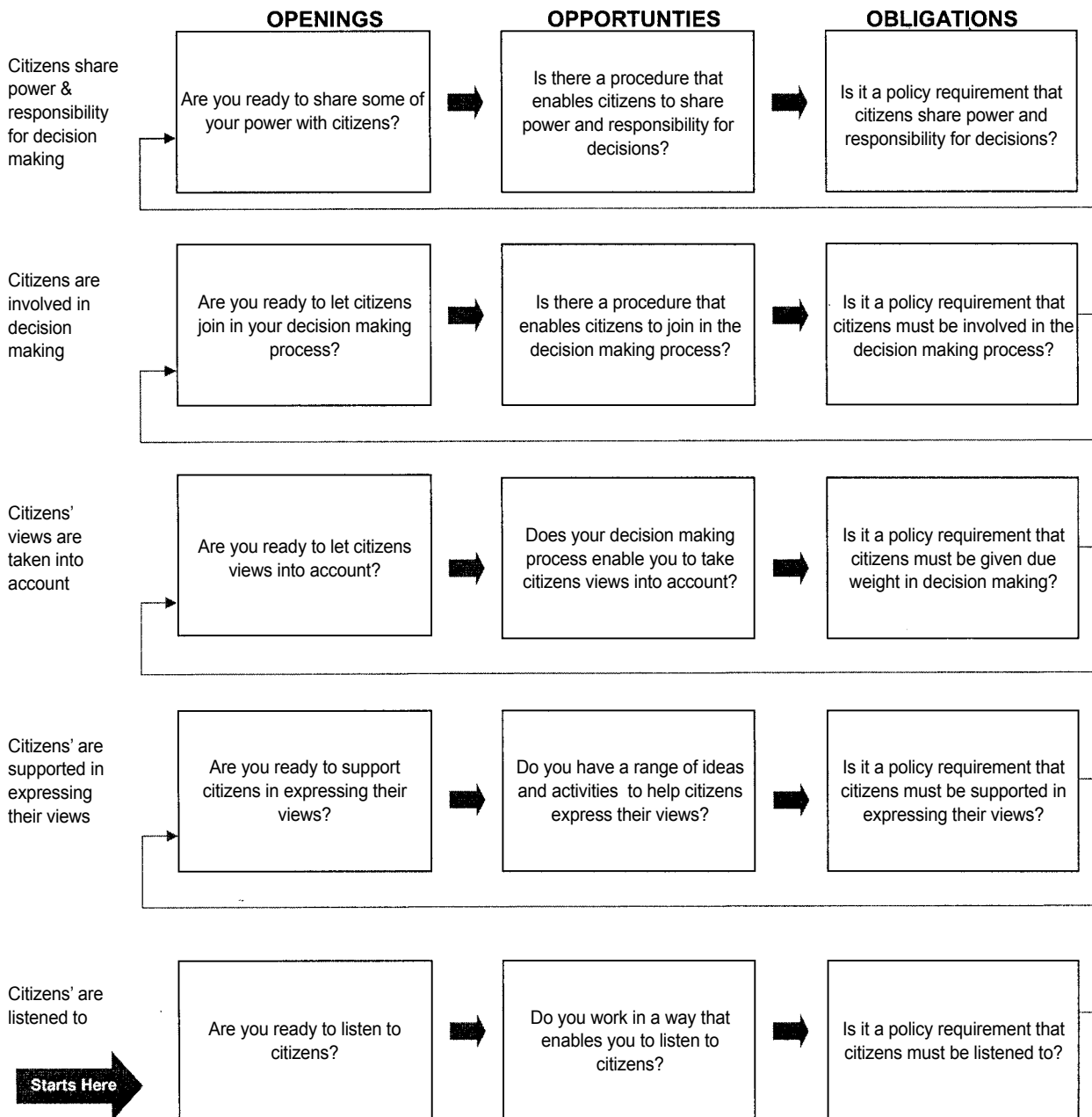
A self-assessment will help identify current and required provision. It will also assist with the development of an action plan. This strategy adopts the Shier’s Model of engagement and self-assessment toolkit (see appendix 1). The model proposes five key areas, these are:-

- Are citizens listened to?
- Are citizens supported in expressing their views?
- Are citizens views taken into account?
- Are citizens involved in decision making?
- Do citizens share power and responsibility for decision-making?

Stage Three - Monitoring and evaluation

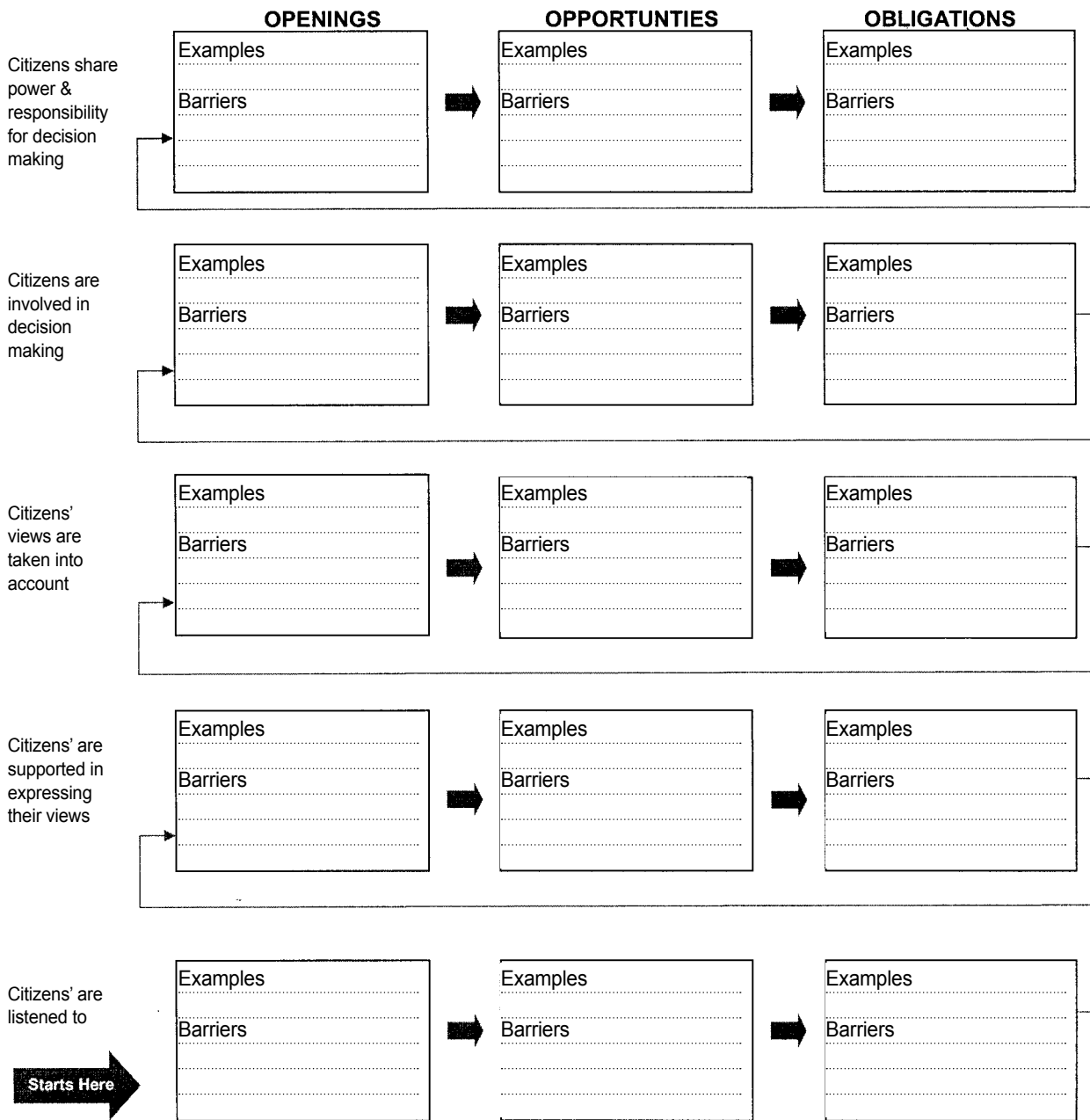
Following the endorsement of this strategy by the LSB, a detailed action plan will be produced and monitored to ensure service improvement. Regular feedback will be presented to the Local Service Board against this action plan and other action plans developed as part of Blaenau Gwent’s Single Integrated Plan ‘ Making a Difference 2013-2017’. Responsibility for implementation rests with all LSB organisations who will also measure their own success using self-assessment toolkits.

Appendix 1 - Engagement / participation self-assessment toolkit



This toolkit has been adapted from the Shiers model of engagement / participation

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For staff to use in conjunction with the self assessment tool. Go through each stage of the tool identifying barriers and further work needed, then complete this form.

	What needs to be done	By Who?	When for?
Listening to Citizens			
Supporting Citizens to express their views			
Taking Citizens' views into account			
Involving Citizens in the decision making process			
Sharing power and responsibility for decision making with Citizens			

This toolkit has been adapted from the Shiers model of engagement / participation

This document is available electronically at
<http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/community/14723.asp>
and in hard copies at each of Blaenau Gwent local libraries. If you would like this document in another format please contact:

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