

## **HALTON LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT**

### **DRAFT STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

#### **Introduction**

This statement of community and voluntary sector involvement (SCI) demonstrates how we have worked together so far, and how we will build on this for the future.

There are many voluntary organisations and community groups in Halton. Their objectives and activities are shared with other stakeholders in the borough. Since 2001 all of these interests have come together to jointly commit to improving life in the borough under the banner of the Halton Strategic Partnership (HSP).

The Halton Strategic Partnership is committed to ensuring that a diverse range of voluntary and community groups are involved in decision-making, resource allocation, neighbourhood renewal and service delivery at an area level. This is fully set out in the recently adopted sustainable Community Strategy for Halton. In taking this forward through the Local Area Agreement (LAA) it is vital that it is based on a shared understanding that all partners are responsible for achieving this.

#### **Engaging residents**

The LAAs timescales meant that there has been limited scope to involve residents directly in the LAA negotiation. However, the Community Strategy was built upon a 12-month period of intense engagement with residents and the voluntary and community sector. It was vital that the process was inclusive. Many people and groups were involved so we could build a clear picture on what was important and how we should go forward. Some of the key steps included:

- A review of our achievements since the first Community Strategy was launched four years ago, and an honest assessment of how well partnership arrangements have worked
- A new State of Halton report was commissioned to look objectively at statistical conditions and changes and trends in social, economic and environmental conditions
- A major telephone survey of residents backed up by focus groups was carried out to seek their views on what life is like, and should be like, in Halton
- A review of regional and national strategies, and those of partners, was carried out to assess the likely impact of this activity in Halton
- An inclusive process of debate and discussion on the way forward took place with members, officers, officials and volunteers of all the organisations involved with the partnership
- A thematic assessment of the challenges facing the borough, and a thorough review of outcomes, outputs and targets was carried out. These helped to

demonstrate how the strategy and partnership working could make a difference in the future.

This process of engagement with people and partners was vital. It is only if there is a shared view of the challenges that Halton faces, and a broad sense of ownership of the resulting strategy, and how it will be taken forward through the LAA -that there will be any chance of its ambitions being realised.

We are committed to consulting and listening to local people and ensuring that their priorities shape the strategic direction of Halton. To underpin this commitment the Partnership has adopted a new and innovative approach to community engagement enshrined in a strategy adopted in October 2005. This has begun to identify best practice models of community empowerment and work to support all partners to develop their practice further. There is a commitment to continue this approach as the LAA is developed.

While partners are effectively consulting local residents in a variety of ways, and can demonstrate that their priorities are shaping the strategic direction of the partnership, we recognise that there is more work to be done. In the first year of the LAA (and the final months of this year) we will focus on further developing the links between our LAA and the community engagement strategy.

### **Building on existing partnership working**

Halton's LAA is built on a broad base of existing partnership working, especially with the voluntary and community sector. Halton already has well established and robust partnership working arrangements. As detailed in the LAA this is based on a hierarchy of Partnership Board, SSPs (thematic partnerships), Performance and Standards Group, and a range of subsidiary partnerships. The community is well represented on all of these bodies with at least 2 representatives per partnership, and indeed the Community Empowerment Network's Chair is the HSP's Vice-Chair.

In addition there are geographical engagement mechanisms through area forums, participation and delivery meetings and putative neighbourhood management boards in our three pilot areas. The Area Forums will shortly refresh area action plans and take on board any ramifications from the LAA. They will be based on wide consultation with local residents, neighbourhood based groups and cross-borough communities of interest and communities of identity. The Area Action Plans will both reflect the emerging priorities of the LAA and act as a mechanism for understanding local priorities to feed into the LAA.

### **Developing the LAA together**

From the outset there has been a commitment to informing the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) about the LAA process and to consulting on the developing LAA. Underpinning this, the LAA Lead Officers Group includes two voluntary sector members from HVA Together.

A range of activities have been planned to keep all stakeholders informed of the development of the LAA and to shape its direction at critical points. In response to

demand events will be held during working hours and also evenings / weekends so that the needs of smaller community organisations and Board Members are met. Even at this early stage we can demonstrate that concerns raised during stakeholder events have influenced the developing LAA. For example:

- The importance of poverty as across cutting issue
- Transport and accessibility
- Properly representing the full range of needs of older people
- A strategic approach towards funding the voluntary sector, moving away from short-term project based funding.

The LAA is now a standing agenda item for monthly Community Empowerment Network (CEN) Executive Board and network meetings so that the VCS infrastructure organisations of the Borough are consulted and informed at regular intervals. Lead negotiators for each block will ensure that the VCS are involved in and inform the emerging priorities targets and actions.

### **Implementing the LAA**

There is a clear opportunity for the LAA to enable an increase in opportunities for the voluntary and community sector organisations to be delivery agents. We welcome the mandatory outcome on the growth of the voluntary and community sector and partners are considering how to support this. Work to achieve this mandatory outcome will build on the continuing work of the Partnership who:

- Support commissioning agencies to develop models for commissioning services that enable VCS organisations to hold contracts
- Promote the contribution the VCS can make in public service delivery
- Build the capacity of VCS organisations to develop the standards, systems and skills required to become 'fit for purpose', bidding for and potentially winning contracts for service delivery.

### **Making a financial contribution**

There is considerable scope for the voluntary and community sector to add value to the LAA:

- In Halton for each £1 of local authority grant investment, the sector levers in a further £6
- When volunteer time is recognised with a notional value of £8 per hour, it would amount to a further £50 million added value to Halton.
- The Small Grants Fund offers voluntary and community groups grants of up to £5,000 to achieve their goals.

We have not addressed in detail whether and how specific funding streams will be brought into the LAA, but Change Up investment plans and the Big Lottery Fund are under discussion.

## **Purpose of the SCI for Halton**

Acknowledging the diversity and independent status of all partners, the SCI for Halton's purpose is to:

- • Be a fundamental reference document setting out processes for improving, monitoring and evaluating the input of local people and partners, relationships, partnerships and cross-sectoral working, at all levels.
- • Establish key principles, shared vision and undertakings.
- • Promote understanding between the sectors, and work together to develop a culture of mutual trust and empowerment.

The SCI for Halton is a framework for the way in which organisations from the community voluntary & public sectors work together. It is based on a number of shared principles:

1. Voluntary action is an essential part of a democratic society.
2. If society is to thrive and work well, it needs to have an independent and diverse community and voluntary sector.
3. All partners are committed to working in partnership towards common aims, whilst recognising that each contributes in different ways.
4. It is recognised that policies and services will be much closer to peoples real needs and wishes if they are engaged and involved in putting their ideas into action.
5. By involving people in decisions and helping them take part in the delivery of services, long-term relationships with the partners are built.
6. All partners recognise and respect equality and diversity and will work to enhance and encourage the implementation of these principles.

To be successful, the SCI aims to involve residents and the VCS in developing the LAA, and more importantly in its implementation. It will:

- Widen access for communities to be involved in or influence the decision-making process.
- Develop the relationship between all sectors and at all levels.
- Improve the flow of information and communication channels between and in, all sectors and the community.
- Develop the network and networking, between and across, all sectors.

## **Established protocol**

The Halton Strategic Partnership has already agreed a protocol, which sets out the expectations in terms of the actions and relationships between partners. The Board has also stated its intention that each of the blocks of the LAA should be underpinned by a similar commitment to involve and engage all partners, and especially the community and voluntary sector, in the design and implementation of the LAA. It is worth highlighting some of the key commitments included in the Halton protocol:

### **Shared Commitments for Halton Strategic Partnership and HVA Together**

1. All involved in the HSPB, HT and all the relevant sub partnerships will be aware of and sign up to the Community Strategy, priorities process, partnership strategies and terms of reference as required.
2. All members' organisations must comply with the equality and diversity policies of HSPB, adhering to the principles and values of the Partnership on equality and fairness.
3. At all levels of representation HSPB and HT will work towards eliminating any barriers for members to access and fully participate in the process. This will include an induction for new representatives, and relevant training and ongoing support from Partnership and HT staff.
4. HSPB and HT will actively work towards a relatively even spread of representation over the geographical area of Halton.
5. The HSPB will recognize the full range of responsibilities that HT is charged with by central government and the relevant levels of emphasis placed on each.
6. Whilst recognizing that Members represent organizations, within Partnership structures they will act in the best interests of the borough rather than advancing their own personal or organizational agendas.

### **Commitment of Halton Strategic Partnership Board to support the full involvement of HVA Together**

1. There will be at least 2 HT representatives on the HSPB and each of the Specialist Strategic Partnerships (SSPs)
2. Wherever possible, each SSP will invite representation from HT onto all sub partnerships and working groups.
3. All representatives are entitled to receive appropriate support and assistance from the Halton Partnership Team, Halton Together support team and or SSP coordinators to enable them to fully participate in meetings

### **Commitment of HVA Together to support the advancement of the LAA**

1. HT representatives will be openly and democratically elected through the Halton Together Network and its recognised sub networks and forums.
2. Halton Together will endeavour to ensure that all representatives have the relevant expertise or are provided with opportunities to develop their knowledge.
3. HT representatives will have the responsibility to ensure that they gather information from and feed back to the wider network the content and context of their involvement and will in turn report to and inform the relevant aspect of the HSPB of the work of HT.

This SCI will form the basis on which the working protocol for involvement of partners in managing the LAA will spring from.

### **Conclusion**

This Statement of Community Involvement seeks to be a fundamental reference document which will establish key principles, shared vision and undertakings, to promote understanding between partners so that they may work together to build trust and

improve the lives of people who live and work in Halton through the Local Area Agreement (LAA).

This provides a basis to help the Halton Strategic Partnership (HSP) to utilise the LAA to streamline and improve service provision, with the maximum inclusion of local people and the community and voluntary sector at every level and to respond to and be driven by the needs of the local community.