

**St Albans City and District
Inclusion Strategy 2011-2015**

How local people can have their say and take part

CONTENTS

Executive summary	3
Introduction	4
Our community	6
Inclusion objectives and how we will deliver them	8
Useful information	15

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Including and engaging with the community is essential to improving life for local people in St Albans City and District. Inclusion is important in itself – ensuring that all parts of the District and all sections of the community have opportunities to contribute to local community life. It also helps to ensure that services provided by different local organisations are focused on the needs of local people, and that money is targeted on the issues that matter most.

This document sets out the District's approach to community engagement and inclusion over the next four years – how local people can have their say and take part. It has been prepared and will be delivered by St Albans City and District Council in partnership with other organisations in the public, private, education and voluntary and community sectors. Delivering the strategy will require strong, open and visible community leadership and communication.

The vision for inclusion in St Albans City and District is “An inclusive community where everyone has the opportunity and capability to take part and contribute to community life”. We have done a lot already, and the strategy sets this out. But it also identifies six objectives and areas of focus to deliver this vision. The strategy has already benefited from a wide range of input from local people and organisations and its objectives are informed by a comprehensive understanding of the community. Specific actions and timescales are set out in the main body of the strategy under each of the six objectives.

Objective 1: To deliver high quality customer service for all

Objective 2: To involve local people in decision making to ensure an active democracy

Objective 3: To involve local people in projects in their community and enable them to take part in community life

Objective 4: To ensure access to better information and feedback for local people and organisations

Objective 5: To understand the community and the needs and concerns of local people, and respond to them

Objective 6: To ensure everyone is included

INTRODUCTION

This strategy has been developed to provide a joined up approach to ensure everyone can have their say and take part in St Albans City & District. By bringing together work on equality of opportunity, developing stronger communities and community engagement we will increase the opportunities for the people who live, work and visit the area to inform decision making and get involved in community life.

Inclusion is an important part of the Council and Local Strategic Partnership's vision for St Albans City and District.

"A progressive, unique and vibrant District, which values its environment, heritage and culture, and cares for the future: an outstanding place to live where everyone can flourish."

Shaping our future together for 2021, St Albans & District Local Strategic Partnership

"Historic St Albans District: a premier community"

Corporate Plan 2011 – 2016, St Albans City and District Council

This strategy has been developed to be clear about what the Council and its partners are doing to tackle exclusion and how local people and groups representing specific parts of the community can get involved to make St Albans City and District a place where everyone can contribute. It will also provide ways for local people to hold the Council and its partners to account for their progress and it sets out clearly what will be done in the next four years.

Our vision for inclusion, supported by this strategy is,

"An inclusive community where everyone has the opportunity and capability to take part and contribute to community life"

Delivering this strategy will require strong, open and visible community leadership from Councillors, staff at the Council and in other local organisations, and community leaders. It will involve challenging prejudices and organisations that are not demonstrating their support for improving inclusion and equality of opportunity, and bring communities together. Councillors will have an important role in championing the Council's ambition and vision for inclusion, by providing visible support to local people, community groups and projects. Effective community leadership is an important part of delivering all six of the strategy's objectives.

The Inclusion Strategy meets the requirements of the new Equality Act including the public sector equality duty which comes into force in April 2011. The Act aims to improve equality of opportunity and promote good relations between all people whatever their background or circumstances. The equality duty, which sets out what the Council should do to meet the aims, covers a number of 'protected characteristics' - race, sex, disability, age, gender reassignment, religion or belief, sexual orientation, and pregnancy and maternity. It also covers marriage and civil partnership with regard to eliminating discrimination.

The purpose of the equality duty is to ensure achieving these aims is fundamental to the day to day activity of the Council and other public organisations. This strategy aims to do this by mirroring the equality objectives required under the Act within its objectives for inclusion and improve the quality of support and the number of

opportunities available for everyone to take part in community life. Local service providers need to do more to ensure equality is built into their decision making and operational procedures, including those commissioned from external organisations.

Government also intends to give communities more powers, encourage people to take an active role in their communities, reduce bureaucracy, and support charities and social enterprises. This approach is likely to best succeed where there are inclusive communities.

In developing the strategy consideration has also been given to the proposals in the Government's Localism Bill which will provide more opportunities for local people and community groups to have a say on key issues that affect the District. The specific details may not become clear for some time but the actions set out in this strategy will start to explore opportunities to take the initiative on some of these areas with partners including town and parish councils, and community groups and local people.

To develop the strategy we have considered emerging Government policy, the results from consultation on the draft strategy and information about the District's communities. This has resulted in the development of a vision for inclusion, the six objectives mentioned above, and specific actions that will enable us to remain focused on the things that really matter and move towards achieving the vision.

We will measure our progress in delivering this strategy in a transparent way to ensure that local people can hold us to account. A detailed implementation plan clearly sets out what should be achieved, by whom and by when. A progress report will be submitted to Cabinet once a year and published on the Council's website.

Local people and community groups will also be updated on progress against the actions at every opportunity, for example, at the Local Strategic Partnership's annual Community Conference. This means that those responsible for delivering the plan are held formally to account via the Cabinet process as well as receiving constructive challenge from local people. We will formally review this strategy in 2014/15 but will report any interim changes to approach and actions arising to Cabinet alongside progress reporting.

OUR COMMUNITY

A detailed analysis of public consultation and information about the community has been carried out. This “community mapping” has shown that:

- The District has an increasingly ageing population but this is at a slower rate than other areas in the country¹. The highest proportion of older people in the district is in Harpenden and St Stephens².
- People from St Albans District tend to live longer than the national average (an extra 2.45 years for males and 1.34 years for females)³.
- The District has a comparatively high proportion of young people (in the top 20% nationally⁴) with the highest proportion in Batchwood². The district has an above average level of 0-4 year olds²; the highest number of 0-15 year olds is in and around the city centre².
- The proportion of the District’s population with limiting long-term illness is below the national average and is also the lowest in the county at 13%².
- Key benefit claimants⁵:
 - Disabled claimants account for 0.6% of population, significantly below the Great Britain average of 1%.
 - Carer claimants account for 0.7% of population, significantly below the Great Britain average of 1.1%.
 - Employment and Support Allowance and Incapacity Allowances claimants account for 3.3% of population, significantly below the Great Britain average of 6.7%.
- The District’s population⁶ is 82.8% White British, 5.2% Other White, 1.7% Irish, 1.6% Indian, 1.4% Bangladeshi, 1% Black African and 0.9% Pakistani. Proportions of Irish, Other White and Mixed race residents are higher than average.
- 1.4% of the District’s population are Bangladeshi. This is the 21st largest proportionally in the country and the highest proportion in Hertfordshire⁶. The Bangladeshi community is concentrated in the Sopwell and Ashley wards of the District².
- The District’s Muslim population is proportionally the second largest in Hertfordshire and there is also a significant Jewish community (the 25th highest in the country²). The Muslim community is largely centred around St Albans City and London Colney wards while Jewish communities are found mostly to the south of the District at its borders with Watford and Hertsmere².
- 85.3% of residents say that people from different backgrounds get on well together (this is much higher than the Hertfordshire and England averages)⁸.
- A high proportion of residents have qualifications with more than half of the population having received higher education – the 11th highest proportion in the country⁷. However there are pockets all over the District where people have no qualifications. London Colney has the greatest number of residents with one GCSE or no qualifications².

¹ Office for National Statistics, Subnational Population Projection (2008)

² Office for National Statistics, Census (2001)

³ Office for National Statistics, Life Expectancy at Birth (2006-2008)

⁴ Office for National Statistics, Mid-year Population Estimate By Broad Age (2009)

⁵ Department for Work and Pensions, Working-age client group – key benefit claimants (May 2010)

⁶ Office for National Statistics, Mid-year Population Estimate by Ethnicity (2007)

⁷ Office for National Statistics, Annual Population Survey (2009)

- Very high proportions of the population are in managerial, senior and professional occupations with many working outside the District². A high proportion of working age residents live near access to key transport routes.
- 27% of residents felt that they were able to influence local decision making⁸ – lower than the county and national average. 68% felt that they would like to be more involved in local decision-making with regard to certain issues⁸. The highest proportion of residents who felt they could influence decisions were in Batchwood, St Peters and Cunningham wards with the lowest proportions in Harpenden West, London Colney and Sopwell. Residents aged 18-34, those who are not White or live in rented accommodation are significantly less likely to have been involved in decision making⁸.
- 59.9% of residents say that they feel that they belong to their neighbourhood⁸ (a little above the England figure and higher than the Hertfordshire average). Those aged 18-34, who are working or living in rented accommodation are least likely to feel that they belong and those aged 65 or over are most likely to feel that they belong⁸.
- 83.3% of residents feel that people in the area treat one another with respect and consideration, compared to 73.8% across Hertfordshire and 68.8% in England⁸.
- There are currently 52 authorised permanent gypsy pitches serving the needs of the gypsy and traveller community in the District.
- Within St Albans City and District there remain 3 areas which are amongst the 30% most deprived in England. These are Batchwood, Sopwell and Cunningham wards⁹.

It is clear that St Albans City and District has a diverse community and that while the District performs strongly as an inclusive community on many levels, there are still some challenges.

A key part of building stronger communities is integration, which enables new and existing residents to understand one another and get on well together. A strong and cohesive community is based on people from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities, knowing their rights and responsibilities, and trusting one another and local organisations to act fairly. This strategy aims to enable this and recognises that there are other groups who engage local people successfully, including the town and parish councils and residents associations, and intends to support and build on their work.

We will continuously analyse information about the District and its communities to ensure that our actions are targeted in the right way. This may lead to changes to the strategy and actions over time, particularly as new information such as the results of the 2011 census becomes available.

The full community profile for St Albans City and District is available on the Council's website – <http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/community-profile>.

⁸ Place Survey – St Albans City and District and Hertfordshire (2008)

⁹ Exploration of Indices of Deprivation – St Albans & District Local Strategic Partnership (2007)

INCLUSION OBJECTIVES AND HOW WE WILL DELIVER THEM

Developing an inclusive community is not easy. We have already made considerable progress however there is still much we can do. The following sections set out what we have done and our next steps against each of the objectives that support our vision to be “*an inclusive community where everyone has the opportunity and capability to take part and contribute to community life*”.

Objective 1 - To deliver high quality customer service for all

The Council has improved access to services, introducing a new call centre, improved reception area at the Council Offices and simpler customer complaints process. Using the Community Panel, a group of over 1,000 local residents representing the District’s population make-up, has helped to ensure that the views and differing needs of community groups have been considered in developing new access and feedback channels.

We are now working with partners to improve access to services further by looking at how we might provide reception and front-desk services together through a Local Services Hub in both City and community locations. Feedback received as part of the consultation on the draft inclusion strategy showed support for this idea and there will be further public consultation as the project develops.

What we will do

During 2011/12 we will

- Implement our customer service pledge to serve our customers promptly and fairly when they call, visit or write to us
(http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/contact-us/customer_pledge.aspx)
- Review the Council’s initiatives for specific groups of residents and customers e.g. ‘estate walkabouts’ for Council housing tenants and how to further develop them in line with this strategy
- Pilot a Local Services Hub with public and voluntary sector partners providing a one-stop shop for customer enquiries

During 2012/13 we will

- Launch the main phase of the Local Services Hub

By 2015 we aim to

- Further develop the Local Services Hub with other partners and across the District

Objective 2 - To involve local people in decision making to ensure an active democracy

Councillors are active in their communities engaging residents and involved in local groups and projects. They support specific events such as meeting young people for debate and discussion as part of Local Democracy Week in October each year.

A parish charter and parish conference twice a year have developed closer working with town and parish councils, and greater understanding of the issues facing each local area. There are also strong examples of the Council listening to local people's views and acting on them, such as the annual workshops to inform the Council's budget making and specific examples such as removing 'Areas of Search' for new housing in the Green Belt in response to Councillor led public consultation on the Local Development Framework, the Council's planning policy document.

However, we know from consultation that not enough local people feel they can influence decisions and they would like to be more involved in decision making on specific issues. This is despite a high level of voter turnout at elections (St Albans District had the 10th highest turnout in the Country at 75% in 2010 for the St Albans parliamentary constituency) and good awareness of the democratic system. There is a big difference in the proportion of residents in each ward who feel they can influence decisions. This suggests a need for more targeted support to specific geographic communities.

What we will do

During 2011/12 we will

- Develop the quarterly Police led ward based priority setting meetings with key stakeholders to consider broader issues and concerns raised by residents
- Promote opportunities for more people to participate in existing Police and Councillor surgeries and other ways to raise concerns and ask questions such as at the Council's Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee meetings
- Expand the events for Local Democracy Week to enable more local people to get involved and meet Councillors, and promote the Council's 'how to become a Councillor' guide
- Promote the new electronic petitioning service on the Council's website
- Explore with town and parish councils and community groups the new rights for neighbourhoods in the Localism Bill including a review of whether new neighbourhood arrangements are needed in non-parished areas
- Explore providing District ward councillors with small budgets to support local community projects in 2012/13

During 2012/13 we will

- Encourage and enable local people and groups to develop online community networks and forums to share concerns and ideas about the issues that matter in their part of the District
- Support parishes and neighbourhoods to take up the new opportunities in the Localism Bill to take on local services or assets and develop neighbourhood plans

By 2015 we aim to

- Increase the proportion of residents who feel they can influence decision making from a baseline of 27% in 2008 and make it more even across the District

Objective 3 - To involve local people in projects in their community and enable them to take part in community life

We want to encourage all sections of St Albans City and District's diverse communities to take part and contribute to community life. Some opportunities are well established such as local people influencing decisions by direct involvement in local projects in wards such as Sopwell.

A Council grants scheme provides money to support local charities and community or voluntary organisations and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) led Targeting Change Fund has distributed over £200,000 to community projects ranging from 'It's Our Oysterfields' involving local people to tidy up their neighbourhood to a drama group for older people. Parish Councils have received money from the District Council for local street scene improvements with decisions on how this is spent guided by local communities.

The LSP is working on a programme called "Getting Involved" which will help more local people to develop the skills needed to take a more active role in the community. This is in addition to work underway to build the capacity of voluntary organisations' boards and local businesses supporting young people to develop their business skills. Feedback on the draft inclusion strategy told us that we need to support more people to become active in their community whether it is a long-term commitment to volunteering or involvement in a one-off project.

What we will do

During 2011/12 we will

- Support LSP partners to help more people obtain the skills to be active in their local community as community leaders including school governors, trustees, magistrates and Councillors
- Establish two community resource centres actively shaped and run by the community themselves in the District's most disadvantaged areas
- Pilot the Mayor's Civic Pride Awards in April 2011 to celebrate individuals and groups who are contributing to the community
- Work with the Centre for Voluntary Service (CVS) to develop a new approach to community small grants for 2012/13 to ensure community groups have the opportunity to bid for small amounts of money to support their local area, and support the CVS to manage the process and provide funding advice to community groups

During 2012/13 we will

- Explore opportunities for local people to have a bigger say on how the Council spends its money, learning from Harpenden Town Council's approach

By 2015 we aim to

- Increase the number of people who feel they belong to their local neighbourhood from a baseline of 59.9% in 2008
- Increase the number of people volunteering regularly from a baseline of 29% in 2008

Objective 4 - To ensure access to better information and feedback for local people and organisations

We want to ensure everyone has access to community information and feels better informed. We have a good track record of running comprehensive community consultation campaigns and use many different approaches to engage with residents. However, our approach could be improved by a better understanding of how different groups would prefer to be consulted and working more closely together to ensure that there are consistent and coherent messages. We also need to provide more frequent and clearer feedback to people who take part in consultation activities and for the wider community, showing what is being done to respond to the issues raised.

National research (2007/08 Citizenship Survey) indicates that the extent to which people feel they can influence decision making is linked to the availability and quality of information, the ease with which people can get involved, and the accessibility of local councillors.

The Council uses a variety of ways to communicate with those who live, learn and work in St Albans City and District to provide them with information about services and how to get involved. These include Community News (the Council's quarterly newsletter which is published as a wrap on the Herts Advertiser newspaper); our website; and targeted leaflets and letters. Our Communications Strategy sets out how we aim to develop our communications with local people. In 2010/11 we have been piloting an A-Z of local services in some parts of the District, and providing additional copies of Community News in local locations such as supermarkets and leisure centres.

What we will do

During 2011/12 we will

- Let everyone know when and how to have their say on key issues across the District through an online consultation calendar and other publicity to make it easier for everyone to know how to have their say and inform decision making
- Review the pilot A-Z of services and work with the town and parish councils to expand circulation across the District
- Improve the Council's website and develop our approach to social media such as Twitter and Facebook so that information is easy to find and respond to

During 2012/13 we will

- Further improve and develop the Council's website to increase access to information and services including those provided by partners, and opportunities for local people to have their say and get feedback
- Review the Communications Strategy 2010-13 to continue to improve the way the Council communicates with residents and further explore opportunities for joint communication with partners

By 2015 we aim to

- Implement with partners a joined up approach to providing information and access to services via the Internet and carrying out consultation with local people

Objective 5 - To understand the community and the needs and concerns of local people, and respond to them

We know that in order to achieve value for money and high quality services we need to understand our communities. We have set up a Council web page which draws together information on the community, our performance, spending and Council decision-making. We already use information from consultation and have recently invested in tools that will help us to understand our customers and direct information to those who need it most. We need to carry out a detailed analysis of all the data available to us to understand the needs and experiences of people in a particular group or communities in a particular place.

What we will do

During 2011/12 we will

- Publish and use the information about local communities such as ward profiles, to help Councillors and local service providers understand and support the communities they serve and inform decision making
- Publish the information required under the equality duty by 31st July 2011 in an accessible way so local people can see how we are performing and the impact of our decisions as part of expanding the information available about the Council (<http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/your-council/>)
- Support the Centre for Voluntary Service to develop an online database of community groups, contacts and resources

During 2012/13 we will

- Update the information about local communities such as ward profiles, with data from the Census 2011, and use it to inform the future shape of the District e.g. where schools, shops and community facilities should go
- Carry out a community survey to gather information on how involved local people feel in the community and their views on Council services
- Refresh the Community Panel of 1,000 local residents representing the District's population make-up to ensure that the views and differing needs of the community are considered when consulting local people

By 2015 we aim to

- Further improve access to information about local communities and develop a more joined up approach to sharing information between partners

Objective 6 - To ensure everyone is included

At the heart of inclusion is equality of opportunity. People can face inequality for many reasons including their race, religion, age, gender, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, and income level. As service providers we will ensure that our services are accessible to all; as community leaders we will ensure that all groups have a voice that is heard and that the causes of inequality are understood and tackled.

We want to ensure that all communities and groups can get their voice heard and feel empowered to express their views and contribute to the future of St Albans City and District. We are also committed to reducing inequality between the most disadvantaged parts of the District and the rest. We have action plans to target local issues (such as health inequalities) in disadvantaged areas, community based projects to reduce inequalities in areas identified in the District's Sustainable Community Strategy and the annual Community Conference bringing local public, private and voluntary organisations and community groups together.

We work directly with community groups that represent faith and disability, including through the Stronger Communities programme involving a partnership between the Council and the Police. Research shows that St Albans District is viewed by most communities as one where people get on well together. However, there is still more we can do to improve our consultation and decision making arrangements and to bring the voices of groups representing the District's diverse communities together, ensure they are heard and are able to directly influence the decisions we make.

What we will do

During 2011/12 we will

- Support the local Centre for Voluntary Service (CVS) to facilitate the development of a network of cultural and faith leaders to come together to consider the issues that may be impacting upon them in the District, and to build trust between them and confidence in local organisations such as the Council
- Build on the successful Community Conference to be more inclusive of all groups and to review progress on delivering this strategy and inform next steps
- Ensure activities reflecting the culture and make up of the local community are included in the St Albans Festival, Food and Drink Festival and other events
- Implement a new process for assessing the impact on the community of proposed changes to services, as part of the Council's internal project management and business planning activities, to inform decision making
- Support the CVS to review the community and voluntary sector 'compact', an agreement of how the Council and the sector will work together, to include a framework for how community groups representing all parts of society in the District can engage with local services and what support they can expect
- Develop the Youth Action Group chaired by Oaklands College and involving organisations that represent and support young people e.g. sports clubs, scout and guide groups, faith organisations, Youth Councils and Youth Connexions Hertfordshire, to focus on the needs of young people and ensure their voice is heard
- Increase outreach work with the most vulnerable communities at risk of exclusion, building on projects underway as part of the Stronger Communities programme and the work of the local Centre for Voluntary Service

During 2012/13 we will

- Explore opportunities to raise awareness of specific groups and issues such as by supporting national celebration days like Inter-Faith Week, LGBT History Month and the International Day of Older People and through other events including the St Albans Festival

By 2015 we aim to

- Ensure the proportion of residents who feel that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together stays at or above the baseline level of 78% in 2008

Useful information

We welcome any comments you may have about this strategy and will use your feedback as part of the annual progress report to the Council's Cabinet, as well as other information from consultation and any changes locally.

If you have any questions about this strategy or require it in **another format** e.g. in large print, Braille, audio or in a language other than English, please contact the Council's Policy & Partnership department on 01727 819552 or email inclusionstrategy@stalbans.gov.uk.

St Albans City & District Council

Website: www.stalbans.gov.uk

Email: contactus@stalbans.gov.uk

Telephone: 01727 866100

Local Strategic Partnership

Website: www.stalbanslsp.org.uk

Email: info@stalbanslsp.org.uk

Telephone: 01727 819349