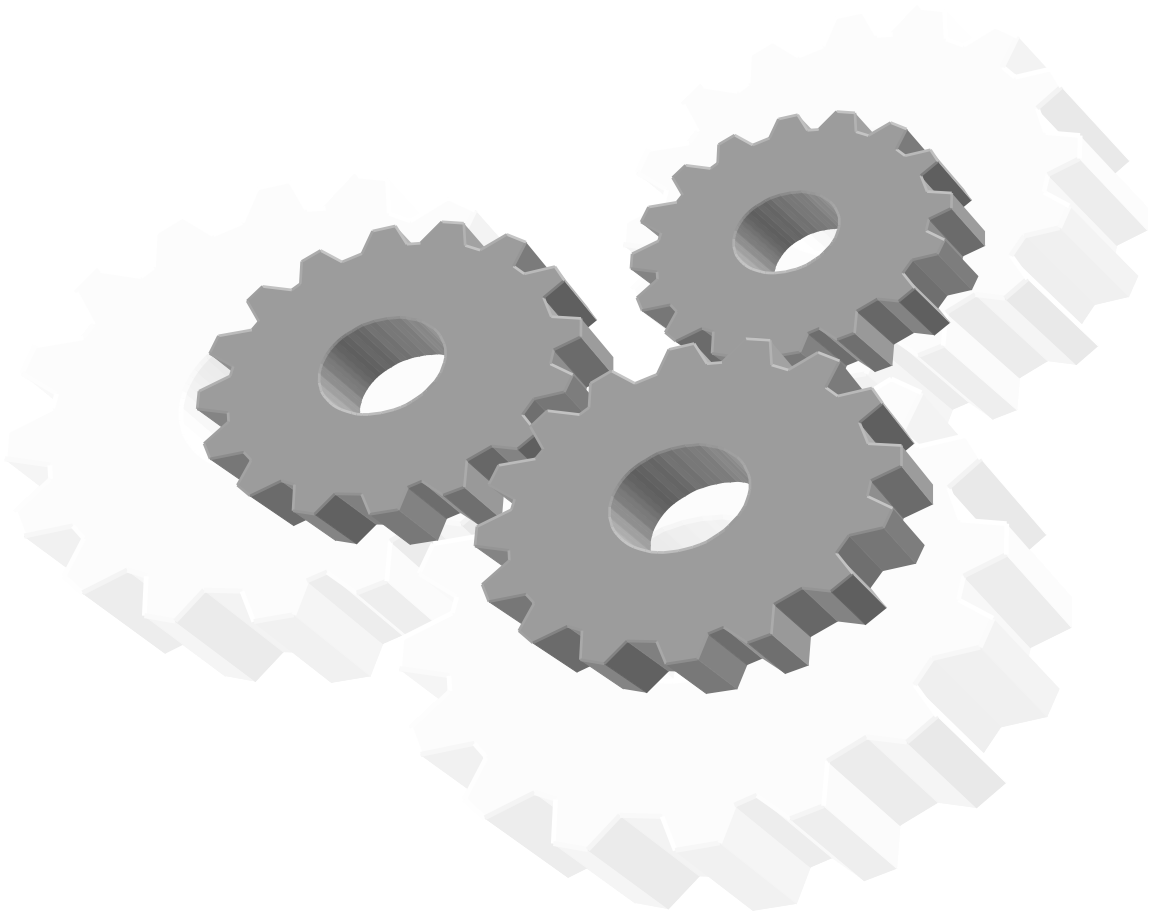


HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE



THE NATIONAL STANDARDS for COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - A REVIEW

1. Background and Context

1.1 Legal Requirements

The Local Government in Scotland Act, 2003, Part 2, Section 15(1), requires local authorities to,

“initiate.....maintain and facilitate Community Planning so that:

(Public)Services.....are provided and the planning of that provision, (of services), takes place

(a) after consultation-

- (i) among all the public bodies, (including the local authority), responsible for providing the service; and*
- (ii) with such community bodies and other bodies or persons as appropriate; and*

(b) “after and by way of such co-operation among those bodies and persons as is appropriate.”

The Act provides the statutory basis for community planning. It requires local authorities to initiate and facilitate community planning, and NHS boards, the enterprise networks, the police, **and the fire and rescue services** to participate.

The aims of Community Planning are to promote:

- joint working – organisations working together to provide better public services - (Partnership Working is the subject of a separate report)¹
- community engagement – making sure people and communities are genuinely engaged in the decisions made on the public services which affect them

A recent Audit Scotland report² produced on behalf of the Accounts Commission found that *“community engagement is progressing but it needs to be more sustained and systematic”*.

¹ Review of Partnership Governance within Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service, June 2006

² Community planning: an initial review, Audit Scotland, June 2006

1.2 Why were the standards created?

The standards were developed because of criticisms that community engagement

- has modest impact
- is tokenistic
- prioritises official views, and
- focuses on peripheral decisions

In addition, other deficiencies identified include;

- limited community influence on agenda setting
- lack of access to relevant information, and
- over-formalised participation procedures
- short time-scales for community consultation

The National Standards for Community Engagement were specifically developed by Communities Scotland for the Scottish Executive to address these criticisms. However, they are also seen as part of the modernising government process that anticipates a cultural shift towards more participatory democracy.

It is envisaged that the overall objective of renewing democracy can only be achieved by encouraging wider involvement. It should be part of the purpose of any community engagement to foster this.

1.3 The importance of engagement

A commitment to public participation is explicit within the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, with an opportunity to demonstrate such commitment possible within the context of Community Planning. The service is an active partner in a large number of Community Planning partnerships, and therefore has an opportunity to influence the engagement process initiated by these.

More importantly, if Community Planning and other participatory policies, such as Integrated Risk Management Planning, are to be delivered effectively, attention to the quality of engagement is essential.

2. The Standards

The Standards for Community Engagement set out ten statements of commitment that can be used to develop and support better working relationships between communities and agencies delivering public services. These are outlined in sections 2.1 – 2.10 below.

They have been endorsed by COSLA and the Scottish Executive and are based on principles of fairness, equality and inclusion. As has been previously stated, they are also a fundamental aspect of the modernising government process that anticipates a cultural shift towards more participatory democracy.

2.1 Involvement

Identifying and involving the people and organisations who have an interest in the focus of the engagement

2.2 Support

Identifying and overcoming any barriers to involvement

2.3 Planning

Gathering evidence of the needs and available resources and using this evidence to agree the purpose, scope, and timescales of the engagement and actions to be taken.

2.4 Methods

Agreeing and using the methods of engagement that are fit for purpose

2.5 Working Together

Agreeing and using clear procedures that enable participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently.

2.6 Sharing Information

Ensuring that necessary information is communicated among participants.

2.7 Working with Others

Working effectively with others with an interest in the engagement

2.8 Improvement

Actively developing the skills, knowledge and confidence of all participants

2.9 Feedback

Feeding back the results of the engagement to the wider communities and agencies affected.

2.10 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluating whether the engagement achieves its purpose and meets the national standards.

3. Indicators

For each of the standards, a suite of indicators has been developed, which sets out the characteristics of 'high quality' community engagement and allow organisations to plan, monitor and evaluate their engagement processes. They will also allow participants to ensure best practice and to achieve continuous improvement.

A summary of the standards and their associated indicators, along with an outline of the implications for the service of adopting each of them, is provided at Appendix A.

4. Current Engagement Methods

4.1 Public Consultation Meetings

The largest engagement process undertaken by the service in recent years was that relating to Integrated Risk Management Planning, (IRMP), and in particular the review of the Community Response Units.

It is fair to say that consultation and engagement on this was wide ranging and that all of the groups identified at the time by the service as being affected, were represented.

Importantly, Board Members and Service Officers made a significant contribution to this engagement process, attending a large number of 'open' public meetings where members of the community, community councillors, local and national politicians and employees were invited to attend.

4.2 Questionnaires and Opinion Surveys

In addition to these meetings, the service sought feedback from communities and businesses in the form of opinion surveys and questionnaires regarding its overarching IRMP. These, (questionnaires and surveys), were also utilised in the development of the current year IRMP action plan.

4.3 Meetings and Discussions with Fire Board Members

As the conduit to members of their local communities, Principal and Senior officers of the service maintain an “open door” policy that allows fire board members to discuss service delivery issues affecting their communities at any time.

4.4 Meetings and Discussions with Community Councils

For many years, the service has maintained an open dialogue with Community Councils through the attendance of its district officers at meetings. As far as possible and where circumstances and resources have allowed, this has been a pro-active process where officers routinely attend every meeting possible.

In some cases however, this has unfortunately had to be a passive activity, with officers attending meetings only when a specific request to attend to discuss a particular issue has been received.

When necessary, or when requested, senior and/or principal officers have also attended meetings.

5. Future Engagement Methods

In addition to our current techniques, there is a range of other methods which the service could adopt. These are outlined below. It must be borne in mind however, that even the most sophisticated engagement process will be meaningless unless cognisance is taken of the standards.

Though not all of the standards will always be applicable to every engagement, most will be relevant to formal, or informal and sustained types of engagement, as well as to the more populist and indirect forms of engagement such as those outlined below.

- engaging communities in one-off public consultation meetings that are open to anyone who wishes to attend.

- formal techniques to consult communities are available, such as Future Search conferences, are quite highly structured with defined representation of particular community interests. Others, such as Planning for Real or Participatory Appraisal are structured but open to wider participation.
- setting up Citizen's Panels that are invited to comment on policy issues that they face. In this example the panel may be made up of a large number of people who are selected to represent different age, gender, race or other population groups but they are not people who have a particular 'axe to grind' and they comment at a distance without involvement in direct discussion with the service
- use of Citizen's Juries, where a relatively small number of people is invited to review evidence pertaining to a particular aspect of policy or practice and to make recommendations. In this case there will be face to face engagement but the jury will operate only in relation to making judgments about the value of particular policies
- other forms of engagement such as referenda or more limited opinion polling or the use of an event such as an exhibition to create opportunity for dialogue with local people

There are many forms of engagement but what is important to note about these examples is that they illustrate differences in terms of levels of formality, time scale, representation and other characteristics.

6. Conclusions

The Service is to be commended for its approach to engagement in the past. It is clear that although existing methods were, and still are appropriate, in their current format, they can be further developed, refined and improved in line with the standards.

No criticism is being leveled at the Service for this. The barriers to participation, and many of the other issues identified in the standards, have not been widely recognised or accepted in the public sector in general or the fire service in particular.

What is important is that the Service is seen to be addressing the standards, as it conducts its future business.

It must be borne in mind that to overcome some of the barriers to participation identified in the standards, lack of transportation, communication aids, (audio loops etc.), addressing the training needs of participants, and other aspects of the standards, could involve the Service in additional expenditure.

Therefore an appropriate balance between Best Value and the needs of individuals or groups must always be a consideration.

The service is involved in and committed to a large number of diverse forums, and not just those for which it has a statutory duty to attend. Our staff are developing an understanding and knowledge of issues which are not traditionally the domain of the fire service.

Our commitment to community planning and engagement is underlined by our desire to be involved in discussions and decision making and through the regular attendance at organised meetings by officers at appropriate levels, who are empowered to take decisions and initiate actions.

The service can be justly proud of its previous endeavours with regard to community engagement, but it must continue to develop these if it is to carry on delivering the high quality services desired by our communities.

To assist in this a number of recommendations are detailed below.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Develop, Publish and Circulate a Statement of Intent

Publication of a 'Statement of Intent' will further demonstrate our commitment to the National Standards for Community Engagement, sending a positive message to our communities that their views are important in shaping a modern fire service and in the delivery of our services.

Consideration should be given to publishing and circulating this as widely as possible, in particular to;

- Fire Board Members
- Community Councils
- National Politicians
- Partner Organisations
- Local Authority Chief Executives
- Chief Officers of other emergency services

This list is not intended to be exhaustive as other appropriate organisations and groups may be identified as having an interest in our commitment.

A draft 'Statement of Intent' is enclosed as Appendix B.

The publication and distribution of a Statement of Intent will have a dual purpose, as in doing so we will be promoting the standards to others. This in itself provides a further demonstration of our commitment to the standards, specifically the “Working with Others” standard; Indicator 5:

“All of those who are committed to the approach and to high standards should see it is a part of their work to encourage others with whom their work brings them in to contact to adopt community participation as normal practice.”

7.2 Place Responsibilities for Managing Community Engagement within a Specific Function

Clearly, commitment to the standards has the potential to significantly increase the workload of the organisation if this is to be done effectively.

If the service is to be seen to be genuinely committed to improving community engagement, then there is a need to manage the process pro-actively. For this reason, responsibility and accountability for it should be vested in a specific function and individual within the service.

With its responsibility for implementation of IRMP, which in itself has a “participatory” requirement, the Community Risk Management, (CRM), function has a clear role in developing appropriate engagement mechanisms to achieve this.

In addition, due to its major position in the organisation as the facilitator of many of our community safety partnerships, (and therefore its clear links to Community Planning), it would appear appropriate that responsibility should lie with CRM.

7.3 Produce a Community Engagement Strategy and Policy

The development of a Community Engagement Strategy, which could include a policy to enable the service to coordinate and plan community consultation exercises by individual departments or the service as a whole.

Given that the users’ guide³ recognises and advocates an incremental approach to achieving the standards, this would enable the service to establish a medium to long-term plan to address this in conjunction with the Service Plan.

³ National Standards for Community Engagement - User's Guide, Communities Scotland, June 2005

7.4 Appoint the Convener as Community Engagement Champion for the Fire Board

Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service is committed to people in our large and diverse area having a greater say in how local services are planned and delivered. The effective engagement of local people is critical to the regeneration of our most disadvantaged communities and in planning how we can work together to reduce risk and make people safer. If local services are to better meet local needs and aspirations, local people need to be genuinely involved in developing these services. It is only by listening to the experiences and ideas of the people who live in these communities that we can find solutions which will make a lasting difference.

The Fire Board members represent local communities and their close links to the people of the area have undoubtedly helped shape and develop the Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service. All Fire Board members have a role to play in improving community engagement and the position of Convener carries with it an inherent need to champion community engagement.

For this reason it is recommended that the Convener be nominated as the Community Engagement Champion for the Fire Board.

1. THE INVOLVEMENT STANDARD

We will identify and involve the people and organisations who have an interest in the focus of the engagement.

This standard deals with who should be involved and what characteristics should be evident in the way that they act. The standard places an obligation on all participants but particular obligations are being placed on those who initiate community engagement.

Indicator 1:

All groups of people whose interests are affected by the issues that the engagement will address are represented

This emphasises equalities and inclusion. To ensure that everyone whose interests are affected by the engagement is effectively represented requires investigation of the issues and their impact from a community perspective.

Indicator 2:

Agencies and community groups actively promote the involvement of people who experience barriers to participation

This indicator relates to positive action for groups that may experience discrimination or exclusion. It recognises the reality that some people will find it more difficult to become involved than others and sets an obligation within the standard to encourage and support them to become active.

It will be important to consider the characteristics of potentially excluded groups and tailor promotional activity to their needs and circumstances. For example selection of appropriate language and media for communication, recognition of the way in which the focus of the engagement may impact on them in particular.

Indicator 3:

Agencies and community groups actively promote the involvement of people from groups that are affected but not yet organised to participate

This is again an indicator concerned with inclusion and equalities. It recognises that not all of those whose interests may be affected by the focus of community engagement may have established means by which they can explore concerns with one another and articulate these on a representative basis.

It is therefore necessary to take action to reach out to such sectors of the community. This can mean assisting them to become organised to be able to consider and represent their interests in formal engagement processes or using more informal engagement that enables more open participation.

Indicator 4:

The people who are involved, whether from agencies or community groups:

- *Want to be involved*
- *Show commitment to take part in discussion, decisions and actions*
- *Attend consistently*
- *Have knowledge of the issues*
- *Have skills, or a commitment to developing skills, to play their role*
- *Have the authority of those they represent, to take decisions and actions*
- *Have legitimacy in the eyes of those they represent*
- *Maintain a continuing dialogue with those that they represent*

This set of indicators focuses on the characteristics that should be evident among participants irrespective of whether they come from agencies or communities.

Want to be involved: Wanting to be involved is a key determinant of positive motivation. It has been found that engagement can suffer as a result of token participation by people who have been obliged to be involved but would rather not be.

Show commitment to take part in discussion, decisions, and actions: It has to be recognised that active participation in discussion, decisions, and actions are things that require skills and self confidence. Though they may be highly motivated, not all participants will have these.

Attend consistently: Community representatives identify lack of consistent attendance by the same agency participants as a major frustration. In particular they complain about lack of continuity between meetings and the difficulty of not being able to establish a working relationship with a specific person.

Have knowledge of the issues: Knowledge of the issues is essential if there are to be informed discussions, decisions and actions. People bring different kinds of knowledge from different sources (both training and experience) but it is important that all of them know about whatever the community engagement is focused on addressing.

Have skills, or a commitment to developing skills, to play their role: Whilst the standards stress the need for skills to enable people to play their roles, they also acknowledge that they may yet need to be developed. That participants demonstrate commitment to developing their skills and become skilled is an important indicator. Both skill and knowledge development may be needed for agency as much as community participants.

Have the authority of those they represent, to take decisions and actions: One of the most frustrating aspects of community engagement has been found to be that participants are unable to commit themselves to decisions. Apart from causing time delays, it leads to anger and confusion as non-participants, external to the engagement process, actually hold the power to take decisions. It has to be acknowledged that there may be occasions when decisions would have implications that need to be reviewed with those that would be affected, however, if the focus and purpose of an engagement process has been clearly defined it should be possible to agree the boundaries of its authority to act. Once this is done the participants should have the authority vested in them by those they represent to act within those boundaries.

Have legitimacy in the eyes of those they represent: Authority to act in a formal engagement process will be dependent on participants being regarded as the legitimate representatives of those on whose behalf they claim to speak. In constituted organisations this is usually a straightforward matter. Senior officers or members can endorse the participation of their representatives. Confirmation of the legitimacy of representatives is an important precondition for effective engagement.

Maintain a continuing dialogue with those that they represent: In part legitimacy of representatives will arise from, and be sustained by, the on-going relationship with those that are represented. Participants who keep their constituency informed of what is going on and listen to and act on their views will retain their legitimacy and authority.



2. THE SUPPORT STANDARD

We will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement

This standard is essential for the achievement of the equalities and inclusion principles that underpin community engagement. On the one hand it addresses the need to appreciate the individuality of potential participants and to assess any particular barriers that may inhibit their capacity to participate.

Cost will be an issue. There can be substantial resource implications to tackling some of the barriers identified within the indicators and there may be constraints that are difficult to overcome. As far as it is in their capacity to do so, those who initiate engagement have obligations to ensure equality of opportunity for those who may wish to participate.

Indicator 1:

The participants identify what support each representative needs to participate

A key indicator of the commitment to good practice is whether the circumstances of each person who wishes to participate are properly assessed in order to ensure that full account can be taken of any barriers that might restrict their opportunity to participate. The indicator does not imply that individuals should be taking responsibility for advocating their own needs but that the engagement system, as a matter of course, takes responsibility for identifying the needs of all participants.

Indicator 2:

There are no practical barriers to participants in community engagement. Where needed, they should have:

- *suitable transport*
- *care of dependents*
- *general assistance*
- *personal assistants*
- *access to premises*
- *communication aids (e.g. loop systems, interpreting, advocacy)*
- *meetings organised at appropriate times*
- *co-operation of employers*

Removal of practical barriers can obviously relate too a range of aspects of people's lives.

Indicator 3:

There are no financial barriers to participants in community engagement including:

- *out of pocket expenses*
- *loss of earnings*
- *suitable transport*
- *care of dependents*
- *personal assistants*
- *communication aids (e.g. loop systems, interpreting, advocates)*
- *timing of meetings*

The areas identified in this standard largely overlap with those in the previous one, however the focus here is on the costs that may be associated with removing the practical barriers. The standard indicates that if public agencies initiate and promote community engagement, they have an obligation to ensure that any consequent costs of participating are met.

Indicator 4:

Community and agency representatives have access to equipment they need (e.g. computers, telephone, photocopying)

One of the difficulties that community participants frequently identify is their lack of access to equipment that enables them to participate fully. It is frequently a major disadvantage if you do not have computing facilities or, even more fundamentally, a telephone. It is in the interest of the whole engagement system to ensure that all its members can communicate effectively and efficiently with one another and that community representatives can communicate effectively with the wider community.

Indicator 5:

Impartial professional community development support is available to community groups involved in community engagement

The standard is saying that such support should be available if requested.

Indicator 6:

Specialist professional advice is available to community groups involved in community engagement

Whilst the previous indicator relates to the specific value of community development support, it is recognised that there are many other types of professional advice that community groups may need. Such professional advice is readily available to agencies that employ specialist staff in a range of roles to ensure that they are properly equipped to carry out their responsibilities.

If community groups are to represent their communities effectively, they also require access to professional advice when it is needed. Such advice needs to come from sources that are not already compromised by acting for other parties to the engagement.

3. THE PLANNING STANDARD

We will gather evidence of need and available resources and use this to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken

This standard focuses on an essential part of the early stages of community engagement. It points out the importance not only of clear planning but of doing it in a fully participatory manner. The associated indicators give attention to how the issues that the engagement will address are understood, what the resources are that will enable a response and who will take what specific actions and when.

Indicator 1:

All parties are involved from the start in:

- *identifying and defining the issues that the engagement should*
- *address, and the options for tackling them*
- *choosing the methods of engagement that will be used*

This indicator refers to the involvement of all parties in planning from the start. Policies that describe themselves as participatory must live up to the reasonable expectation that those who are affected have a right to be involved in decisions that may impact on them.

Indicator 2:

Participants express views openly and honestly

It follows from the discussion of indicator1 that if the parties to the engagement bring different perceptions of the issues to be addressed and what methods they may favour, it is essential that these are fully discussed between them.

It is really important to try to ensure that all the views held by all those who will play a part are brought out in the discussion and that any lack of clarity is resolved. This will not necessarily mean that there are not strongly held differences that may be a source of conflict. Sorting out such differences at the start is essential.

Indicator 3:

Participants agree the amount of time to be allocated to the process of setting the purpose/s of the engagement

This indicator has been included to stress the need to recognise that agreeing what the engagement will be about and how it will be conducted requires time but must also avoid seemingly unending negotiation. It is seen as sensible to agree a period in which the necessary exchange of views and consequent decision making will take place.

Indicator 4:

The purpose of engagement is identified and stated in relation to the evidenced need/s, agreed by all participants and communicated to the wider community and agencies that may be affected

Those that precede it imply this indicator. It is not just saying that a clear purpose for the community engagement should be agreed but it is also emphasising that this should reflect the evidence that is available.

Reaching agreed purposes might require compromises based on recognition of the legitimacy of the aspirations of other parties and the practical difficulties that may be involved in achieving some goals.

Indicator 5:

Public policies that impact on the engagement are explained to the satisfaction of the participants and the wider community

The focus of community engagement frequently relates to issues in which there is established law or public policy. The indicator is making the point that for all the participants to work together they need to understand the policy context – what it encourages, permits or prevents.

Indicator 6:

The participants identify existing and potential resources that will be available to the engagement process and to achieving its purpose/s (e.g. money, people, equipment)

There is always a need to ensure that any purposes that are set are achievable. This does not imply that there should be lack of ambition but that it is necessary to take care to ensure that what will be likely to be involved in reaching particular goals has been appreciated and that the resources that may be required will be available.

Indicator 7:

Intended results, that are specific, measurable and realistic, are agreed and recorded

This indicator flows logically from the previous one. A clear understanding of the relationship between the needs and the resources enables the setting of intended results that are clear and precise. The indicator makes the point about realism discussed above, but also stresses the need to be specific about what the results should be and to ensure that it will be possible to say whether the result has been achieved.

Indicator 8:

The participants assess the constraints, challenges and opportunities that will be involved in implementing the plan

Just as assessing resources enables realism, so too does careful thought at the start about the factors that will help and hinder the achievement of the intended results.

Indicator 9:

The participants agree the timescales for the achievement of the purpose/s

Whereas indicator 3 focused on identifying the time to be given to agreeing the purposes of the engagement, this one refers to the time within which the purposes should be achieved. The time scale that is appropriate will depend on the complexity of the issues and the resources that are available to tackle them.

Indicator 10:

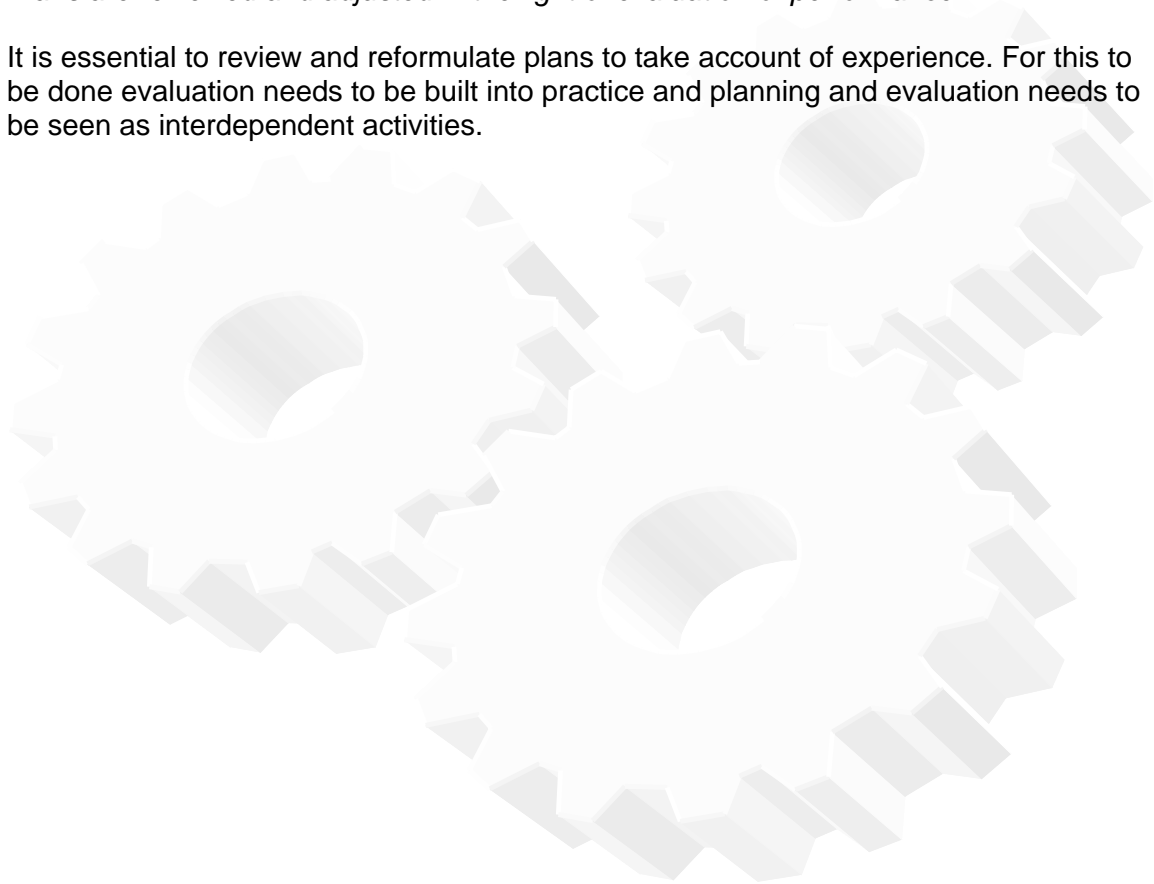
The participants agree and clarify their respective roles and responsibilities in achieving the purpose/s

Planning is not only about deciding what should be done and how, it is also about agreeing who will do what. Roles and responsibilities need to be agreed. Everyone needs to be clear about their own role and responsibilities and about what they can expect and hold others to account for doing. Clarity about this is an essential basis for monitoring and evaluating progress.

Indicator 11:

Plans are reviewed and adjusted in the light of evaluation of performance

It is essential to review and reformulate plans to take account of experience. For this to be done evaluation needs to be built into practice and planning and evaluation needs to be seen as interdependent activities.



4. THE METHODS STANDARD

We will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose

This standard focuses on the way in which community engagement is conducted. It recognises that there will be a range of possible approaches. The key message is that methods should enable the involvement and support standards to be met whilst also ensuring that the purposes can be achieved.

Indicator 1:

The range of methods used is

- *acceptable to the participants*
- *suitable for all their needs and their circumstances*
- *appropriate for the purposes of the engagement*

This indicator begins by emphasising that there is a range of possible methods of engagement. Different methods are designed to support different purposes and should be selected accordingly.

Indicator 2:

Methods used identify, involve, and support excluded groups

Throughout the development of the standards equalities and inclusion principles have been paramount. This indicator sets out to ensure that these principles will be reflected in the methods that are selected.

Indicator 3:

Methods are chosen to enable diverse views to be expressed, and to help resolve any conflicts of interest

Recognising and valuing the expression of diverse views is a theme of the standards. It is also recognised that conflicts will be inevitable and necessary in a democratic process. Hence they should be treated as a normal part of community engagement. Valuing diversity of opinion enables different perspectives to be addressed openly and constructively with the result that conflict can become a positive feature of community engagement. The methods adopted must enable this approach.

Indicator 4:

Methods are fully explained and applied with the understanding and agreement of all participants

Another consistent theme of the standards is that the quality of community engagement benefits when participants fully understand the process that they are involved in. Shared responsibility for choice of approach is likely to lead to shared commitment to resolving difficulties rather than recriminations over past decisions that participants felt they were unable to influence.

Indicator 5:

Methods are evaluated and adapted in response to feedback

Whilst there is a specific standard, (number 10), that addresses the conduct of evaluation, its importance is acknowledged in several other standards. Here the point is being made that the methods that are adopted should be a focus for what is evaluated and that, since evaluation is integrated into practice, the evidence that is fed back from it should be used to adjust the methods that are being employed or the way that they are being applied.



5. THE WORKING TOGETHER STANDARD

We will agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently

This standard focuses on the quality of the working relationships between the participants in the process. It sets indicators for individual and organisational behaviour and applies equally to all participants. It is not possible for individuals to meet these expectations if they are constrained by organisations that set conditions on their participation that contradicts them. Equally it is not possible for organisations as a whole to sustain positive relationships if their individual representatives fail to meet these expectations.

Indicator 1:

The parties behave openly and honestly – there are no hidden agendas, but participants also respect confidentiality

Transparent and open behaviour will be much more likely where there is an established consensus about purposes and actions. It is unlikely therefore that this standard can be achieved without earlier standards, especially those related to planning, having been met.

Despite the importance attached to open and honest communications, the indicator nonetheless recognises that there will be areas in which confidentiality is required. It is essential that all participants recognise the difference between confidentiality and hidden agendas.

Indicator 2:

The parties behave towards one another in a positive, respectful and non-discriminatory manner

Again the equalities principles underpinning the standards are highlighted.

Indicator 3:

The parties recognise that participants' time is valuable and that they may have other commitments

Community engagement involves commitment of time and energy from all participants. The parties to the engagement need to ensure that the actual demands of the process take account of the reality of people's lives and that commitments that will be involved are carefully assessed at the start.

Indicator 4:

The parties recognise existing agency and community obligations, including statutory requirements

All parties come to formal community engagement with an established role and responsibilities. The engagement process and actions that it may propose has to take

account of these existing commitments. They may be set down in policy or indeed be legal requirements that have to be performed.

Indicator 5:

The parties encourage openness and the ability for everyone to take part by:

- *Communicating with one another using plain language*
- *Ensuring that all participants are given equal opportunity to engage*
- *and have their knowledge and views taken into account when taking*
- *decisions*
- *Seeking, listening to and reflecting on the views of different individuals*
- *and organisations, taking account of minority views*
- *removing barriers to participation*

This indicator brings together a series of features of the way in which the parties will work with one another that will lead to inclusive and open participation.

Indicator 6:

The parties take decisions on the basis of shared knowledge

This is a further extension of principles set out in indicator 4. It reinforces the value of the combined wisdom of the participants.

Indicator 7:

The parties identify and discuss opportunities and strategies for achieving change, ensuring that:

- *key points are summarised, agreed and progressed*
- *conflicts are recognised and addressed*

This indicator continues to reinforce themes in the section. Effective responses to issues require suitable means of achieving change. It is a shared responsibility for participants to identify and review the options and to do so in a manner that ensures that everyone understands what is being done.

Indicator 8:

The parties manage change effectively:

At the core of any community engagement process will be the achievement of change in relation to whatever issues have been seen as necessitating it in the first place. This indicator sets out core characteristics that should be in evidence.

Indicator 9:

The parties use resources efficiently, effectively and fairly

Planning standard indicator 6 highlights the need to identify resources that can be used to achieve the purposes of engagement. This indicator focuses on the ongoing responsibility to work together to use them well.

Indicator 10:

The parties support the process with administrative arrangements that enable it to work

A frequently cited weakness of community engagement is that when parties come together there is a lack of adequate resources to support the process administratively. Participants in the preparation of the standards felt that agencies that initiate engagement have a prime responsibility to arrange administration, however other agencies may also be able to contribute.



6. THE SHARING INFORMATION STANDARD

We will ensure that necessary information is communicated between the participants.

This standard is an extension of the working together standard and focuses on a specific aspect of these relationships that is seen as of particular importance.

Indicator 1:

Information relevant to the engagement is shared between all parties

It is fundamental to equal opportunity to participate that everyone has access to all relevant information and can communicate information that they wish to. Capacity to do this may be dependent on having met support standard indicator 4 relating to equipment that participants need.

Indicator 2:

Information is accessible, clear, understandable and relevant, with key points summarised

One of the most frequent complaints of community representatives is they receive information that uses unnecessary technical language and is presented in an unattractive and inaccessible manner.

Sometimes, however, the complaint is that information is simply not provided, with the consequence that decisions may lack proper consideration of all relevant matters.

Indicator 3:

Information is made available in appropriate formats for its users

This standard returns to the theme of removing barriers to participation. If a proper assessment as been done (support standard indicator 2), needs of participants for particular formats will have been identified. These may include, large print, Braille, languages other than English, audio or visual material.

Indicator 4:

Information is made available in time to enable people to fully participate and consult others

Not only do participants in community engagement complain about the volume and clarity of information they also frequently complain that they do not get it in time to enable them to digest it fully themselves let alone share and reflect on it with others with an interest. Agreeing the timing of access to information needs to take full account of the pace of consultative processes that may be required.

Indicator 5:

All participants identify and explain when they are bound by confidentiality and why access to such information is restricted

This standard places an obligation on all participants to explain why confidentiality is necessary in particular circumstances.

Indicator .6:

Within the limits of confidentiality, all participants have equal access to all information that is relevant to the community engagement

Apart from the bounds of confidentiality all parties need equal access to information to enable them to participate on an equal footing.



7. THE WORKING WITH OTHERS STANDARD

We will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement.

In this standard recognition is given to the fact that community engagement does not operate in isolation. In the context of Community Planning, for example, community engagement relating to local plans needs to relate to similar engagement at local authority wide level and thematic plans need to relate to area plans.

National organisations or partnerships may be addressing issues that are pertinent at local level or visa versa. All of this requires parties to specific community engagement processes to think about with whom they may need to have working relationships and how these will be conducted.

Indicator 1:

The parties identify other structures, organisations and activities that are relevant to their work

This indicator seeks to ensure that the parties to the engagement investigate the context of their own activity to identify who else is doing work that is relevant to, or may have a bearing on, their own activities.

Indicator 2:

The parties establish and maintain effective links with such other structures, activities and organisations

This indicator extends the responsibility of the parties to making contact with those other structures and organisations. The purpose of this is to pursue their mutual benefit by exchanging information that is relevant.

Indicator 3:

The parties learn about these structures, activities and organisations, to avoid duplication of their work and complement it wherever possible

Establishing links is only purposeful if it enhances performance. In a situation where there may be potential for duplication of activity and possibly tensions between priorities being pursued at different levels, it is essential that initiatives and organisations involved in them find out about one another. It is possible, for instance, that other initiatives may already have collected relevant information that is relevant. Making use of it avoids consultation fatigue, enhances efficiency and adds value.

Indicator 4:

The parties learn from others and seek improvement in practice

This indicator is seeking to recognise that particular community engagement initiatives are usually part of wider systems that should be giving attention to their mutual learning. On the basis of this it will be possible to improve practice.

Indicator 5:

The parties encourage effective community engagement as normal practice

All of those who are committed to the approach and to high standards should see it is a part of their work to encourage others with whom their work brings them in to contact to adopt community participation as normal practice. This is a core goal of Modernising Government and the Scottish Executive's 21st century government strategy.



8. THE IMPROVEMENT STANDARD

We will develop actively the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants.

Achieving all the standards for community engagement is the basis for effective practice. Meeting this standard is a key means of enabling this to happen.

This set of indicators focuses on the importance of addressing the learning needs of all the participants in community engagement to enable them to contribute more effectively and, in turn, to enable the whole engagement system to be more effective. Resources need to be in place to support this.

Indicator 1:

All parties are committed to maximising the understanding and competence of community and agency participants

This indicator sets down a commitment to developing the abilities of the participants to their full. What is being sought is a mutual commitment amongst all participants to a culture of learning that improves performance.

Indicator 2:

All participants have access to support and opportunities for training or reflection on experience to enable them and others to participate in an effective, fair and inclusive way and meet the standards set out in this document

It follows from the commitment to maximising understanding and competence that there must be access to opportunities for learning. Since community engagement is a shared experience, this should be an activity that involves all the partners.

Indicator 3:

Each party identifies its own learning and development needs and together the participants regularly review their capacity to play their roles

This indicator places an obligation on all participants to take responsibility for identifying their own learning needs, whether in relation to understanding or competence. However it simultaneously sets an obligation on all the parties to take shared responsibility for reviewing their ability to play their respective roles. Creating a working relationship in which people are able to identify weaknesses as well as strengths and in which there is recognition of the interdependence of the system will be important.

Indicator 4:

Where needs are identified, potential of the participants is developed and promoted

This indicator is self-explanatory. It simply sets down the expectation that if a learning need that impacts on the community engagement process is identified, a response will be made.

Indicator 5:

The competence and understanding of the engagement system as a whole is regularly evaluated by the participants as it develops

This indicator makes two key points, firstly that all the people involved in the engagement are part of a system that has to be competent and knowledgeable as a whole – it is the sum of the competence of its parts that determines its overall effectiveness. Secondly it is indicating that learning is a continuous process. By definition learning for continuous improvement needs continuous evaluation of the needs of the participants.

Indicator 6:

Resources, including independent professional support, are made available to make the most of the competence and understanding of individual participants and the engagement system as a whole

Learning needs cannot be met without resources. It will be important when planning long-term community engagement to identify resources that will be available for this purpose.

Indicator 7:

There is adequate time for competence and understanding to be developed

The pace of the engagement process needs to be related to the time that will be required for people to develop the understanding and skills that they require in order to contribute effectively.

Indicator 8:

Methods used to improve competence and understanding reflect diverse needs and are fit for purpose

People learn in different ways and feel comfortable with different approaches to learning. Different participants also have different experiences, skills and barriers as learners. Everyone needs to feel included and the pace needs to meet the needs of them all.

Indicator 9:

Participants share their skills, experience and knowledge with community and agency colleagues

The modernising government process that is a key context for the development of these standards anticipates a culture shift towards more participatory democracy. Sustainable change depends on the transmission of skills that can be applied to new circumstances by other people.

9. THE FEEDBACK STANDARD

We will feed back the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected.

One of the most frequent frustrations expressed by community representatives involved in developing these standards was their experience that they could be involved by public agencies but sometimes were themselves not informed what the impact of this had been. Even more frequently they complained that little effort was put into communicating with the wider community that was affected and that, without adequate resources, they were left to do the job.

Indicator 1:

Organisers of community engagement regularly feed back, to all those affected, the options that have been considered and the decisions and actions that have been agreed. This is done within an agreed time, to an agreed format and from an identified source

This indicator not only states the principle that feedback should be given to all those that are affected but also begins to identify ways in which it should be given and what its contents should include.

Feedback should be regular. This does not indicate a specific frequency, as that will need to be judged in the context of particular engagement processes. But it does indicate that those that are affected know when they should expect to have information.

Indicator 2:

Feedback is provided regularly to communities and organisations on the outcomes and impact of these decisions and actions, within an agreed time, to an agreed format and from an identified source

This indicator extends the previous one focusing on the need to maintain feedback over time to give both people in communities and staff of organisations information about what the results and effects of decisions and actions have been. Timescales should be set and formats and sources agreed so that people know what to expect and when.

Indicator 3:

Explanations as to why decisions and actions have been taken are shared along with details of any future activity

Again the indicator extends the requirements for the content of feedback. The contributors to developing the standards were clear that it was not enough to know what the options, decision and actions had been. It was also essential for those affected to have an explanation of them.

Indicator .4:

The characteristics of the audience are identified to ensure that

- *Relevant information is provided using understandable language*
- *Relevant information is provided in appropriate languages*
- *A suitable range of media and channels is used constructively to reach them*

To maximise the effectiveness of the feedback, this indicator emphasises the need to know the audience. Commonly the audience will have diverse characteristics and there will be a need to consider using a range of methods and possibly several languages to ensure that inclusion is achieved.

Indicator 5:

Information identifies opportunities for involvement in community engagement and encourages positive contributions from groups and individuals in the community

The overall objective of renewing democracy can only be achieved by encouraging wider involvement. It should be part of the purpose of any community engagement to foster this. This indicator focuses on the recognition of the potential for groups and individuals to become actively involved in the engagement process, directly or indirectly.

Indicator 6:

Information promotes positive images of all population groups in the community and avoids stereotypes

This is not saying that the views, activities or behaviour of all members of any community necessarily deserve to be treated positively. For example, racist or criminal elements should be the focus of challenge. They have no positive image to be projected. This is why the term 'population groups' is used rather than alternatives like groups in the community.

A population group consists of a category of people, for example people in a particular age band, people with learning disabilities, gypsy travelers, or people who are gay or lesbian. Any such group has an unrestricted right to equality of opportunity and regard by others. Hence the point that is being made here is that the image of all such population groups should be presented positively in information that is provided.

Good practice in community engagement challenges prejudices and a particular area in which this can be achieved is the manner in which feedback (and indeed any other information) portrays people.

10. THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION STANDARD

We will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purposes and meets the national standards for community engagement.

The final standard relates to monitoring and evaluation. Though it appears at the end, the point has already been made in discussion of the planning standard that monitoring and evaluation should be continuous activities that feed into the ongoing improvement of the process and its results. Hence planning monitoring and evaluation are integrated and mutually dependent activities.

Planning sets out purposes and criteria for success, monitoring ensures that information is recorded relating to actions and evaluation judges the benefits that have resulted and the lessons that have been learned. In a cyclical process the lessons feed back into future planning. Even when an engagement process ends and a final evaluation is conducted lessons should still feed into new examples of engagement.

Indicator 1:

The engagement process and its effects are continually evaluated to measure progress, develop skills and refine practices

This indicator stresses that evaluation is not an event but a process. It is something that should be integrated into practice as a continuous means of learning and development. The evaluation applies both to examining the way in which things have been done and the effects that they have had. Hence evaluation is connected to all the other standards and indicators.

Indicator 2:

Progress is evaluated against the intended results and other changes identified by the participants

This indicator links planning and evaluation. However it is important to realise that what is planned may not be what results and that it is therefore essential to focus on what did happen not just whether the intentions were achieved.

Indicator 3:

The participants agree what information needs to be collected, how, when and by whom, to understand the situation at the start of the engagement and as it progresses

Since this is a participatory approach, just as all the parties needed to agree on the purposes of the community engagement so too they need to agree on what sorts of information will provide them with evidence to measure progress. This information needs to be gathered in a systematic manner as work proceeds.

Indicator 4:

Relevant participants collect and record this information

This indicator follows from the previous one and simply ensures that information is actually collected and recorded. It also indicates that the information needs to be

analysed in relation to progress against intended results to identify the messages that should be taken from it.

Indicator 5:

The information is presented in a user friendly and accurate way

Once analysed information needs to be available to all the participants. As in other aspects of the standards this needs to be in a straightforward and readily understandable form and languages suitable for the particular participants.

Indicator 6:

The participants agree the lessons to be drawn from the evidence of the result and changes

As with all other aspects of reaching agreement all parties should be enabled to play their part in the discussion.

Indicator 7:

The participants act on the lessons learned

To complete the evaluation and planning cycle the lessons need to be built in to new plans and acted upon.

Indicator 8:

Progress is celebrated

The idea of celebrating progress was seen by those involved in developing the standards as particularly important. In order to build up the commitment of everyone involved, positively recognising that progress is being made is vital. Of course lack of progress should be acknowledged but too often community engagement founders on frustration and recrimination about failure whilst successes go largely unremarked.

Indicator 9:

The results of the evaluation are fed back to the participants and the wider community

The results of evaluation are a particularly important aspect of what needs to be fed back to the wider community and agencies. The feedback to them should include celebration of progress. This indicator needs to be progressed in the light of the feedback standard indicators.

Indicator 10:

Evidence of good practice is recorded and shared with other agencies and communities


This indicator links in with standard 7 on working with others. It indicates the importance of recording and sharing lessons from evaluation with others. A culture in which this became normal practice would be beneficial to all.

HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE



ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITIES

STATEMENT OF INTENT



***"Committed, with our partners, to involving
our communities in the development of
services and initiatives to enhance their lives
and safety."***

INTRODUCTION

This document represents the commitment of Highlands & Islands Fire & Rescue Service to the National Standards for Community Engagement.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

"Community engagement is a process that involves purposeful dialogue between public agencies and communities aimed at improving understanding and taking more effective action to achieve beneficial change."

***National Standards for Community Engagement
Communities Scotland***

WHAT ARE THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **Involvement**

We will identify and involve people and organisations who have an interest in the focus of the engagement.

- **Support**

We will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement.

- **Planning**

We will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this evidence to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken.

- **Methods**

We will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.

- **Working Together**

We will agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently.

- **Sharing Information**

We will ensure that necessary information is communicated between the participants.

- **Working with Others**

We will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement.

- **Improvement**

We will develop actively the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants.

- **Feedback**

We will feed back the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation**

We will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purposes and meets the national standards for community engagement.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Highlands & Islands Fire & Rescue Service recognises that the National Standards for Community Engagement have the potential to transform the quality of engagement and provide measurable performance statements that can be used to achieve the highest quality engagement process and results.

Equally, as an organisation committed to Best Value, we must ensure that our aspirations are matched to our capacity to deliver within the constraints of our human and financial resources.

Achieving our aspirations will not happen overnight. It will be a process of small steps and incremental changes.

As a first step, we have developed this statement of intent which we believe will give our future work on community engagement an important focus.

We have circulated our "Statement of Intent" to our partner organisations to raise awareness of the standards and to promote the standards to them.

We have placed responsibility for Community engagement within our Community Risk Management function.

Tel contact 01463 227000 or e mail trevor.johnson@hifrs.org

We have given a commitment to develop appropriate strategies and policy to improve community engagement.

The Fire Board have nominated the Convener of the Fire Board as the Community Engagement Champion.

Email contact:: drew.mcfarlaneslack@highland.gov.uk.

Our next step is to use the Standards to undertake a review of where we are now to establish our current position in relation to the Standards.

Following this review, we will develop an action plan that will enable us to close any gaps that may be identified in the review process.

Brian A Murray
Chief Fire Officer

Drew MacFarlane Slack
Fire Board Convener

