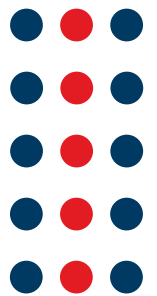


NATIONAL COMMUNITY PLANNING SELF-ASSESSMENT



East Lothian National Community Planning Self-Assessment Progress Case Study: Rebuilding Trust and Strengthening Community Influence in Community Planning



Overview

East Lothian Community Planning Partnership (CPP) have demonstrated how CPPs move beyond consultation towards genuine community influence. By rebuilding trust, embedding community representatives within governance structures, reducing consultation fatigue through an “only ask once” approach, and engaging more than 25,000 voices in shaping its new Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP), the partnership is creating a more collaborative and community-led model of planning and decision-making.

Background

Following its National Community Planning Self-Assessment, East Lothian CPP identified an opportunity to strengthen community engagement and ensure that community voices have a more meaningful influence on partnership priorities and decision-making. The partnership also recognised the need to improve relationships between community representatives, elected members and strategic leaders, particularly where communities had felt disconnected from the work of the CPP.

Rather than viewing engagement as a single consultation exercise, the CPP sought to create a more collaborative and transparent approach, ensuring communities were involved in shaping priorities, contributing to governance arrangements and receiving clear feedback on how their views had informed decision-making.

- **Action for Improvement 1:** Further develop the CPP’s approaches to community engagement to ensure the views of the wider community influence the work of the partnership.
- **Action for Improvement 2:** Review how Elected Members and community representatives engage with the leadership of the partnership.



What Was Done?

Designing a More Inclusive Approach to Engagement

A multi-agency officers' group was established to coordinate engagement activity during the development of the new LOIP. Partners took lead roles in various aspects of the work, helping to create a more joined-up and collaborative approach across organisations.

The LOIP engagement process was designed using Integrated Impact Assessments (IIA) and Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIA), helping partners identify more inclusive methods of engagement. Community organisations were involved in developing materials which they could use directly with groups that already trusted and engaged with them. As a result, more than sixty-four organisations contributed evidence and feedback into the process.

The CPP also made use of accessible engagement techniques, including short videos with audio and subtitles, helping reach wider audiences, including young people and communities requiring additional support.

Importantly, the partnership adopted an "only ask once" principle, using existing evidence and engagement findings wherever possible rather than repeatedly asking communities for the same information. Data from school surveys, Place Standard exercises and other consultation activities was incorporated into the LOIP process, reducing consultation fatigue and making better use of existing community intelligence.

The adoption of the "only ask once" principle demonstrates a practical and community-centred approach to engagement. By drawing together existing evidence and coordinating engagement activity across services, the partnership has reduced duplication and made participation more meaningful for residents.



Embedding Community Voice in Governance

Alongside wider engagement activity, the CPP strengthened community representation within its governance arrangements. Representatives from the Association of Community Councils and East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel now attend every CPP Board meeting, while Chairs from the six Area Partnerships participate on a rotational basis. This creates ongoing opportunities for influence rather than engagement taking place only at specific consultation points.

The partnership also held a dedicated follow-up session with community representatives after the self-assessment process, attended by senior leaders including the Chief Executive, Board Chair and Police representatives. This provided an opportunity to discuss the concerns raised during the self-assessment, reflect on progress and agree future priorities together.

Community representatives have subsequently become involved in a Board development short-life working group led by NHS Lothian, helping shape improvements to governance arrangements, member induction, terms of reference and wider partnership practice.

A particularly strong feature of East Lothian's approach has been its willingness to openly acknowledge community concerns about feeling disconnected from the CPP and to actively involve communities in shaping the response. Holding dedicated follow-up conversations with community representatives has helped rebuild trust and create a stronger foundation for future engagement.

Strengthening Political and Partnership Leadership

To enhance the connection between community planning and local democratic leadership, the leaders of the three main political parties now sit on the CPP Board. The Council Leader has also become actively involved in the Board development work being taken forward through the short-life working group.

The CPP has also broadened participation from key organisations and refreshed Board membership arrangements. In addition, two new Strategic Groups were established to lead work on the Living Well and Keeping Safe priority themes. These groups are co-chaired by partners from different organisations, helping reinforce shared ownership and collaborative leadership. The use of co-chairing arrangements within strategic groups and the involvement of elected members, communities and partners in leadership discussions provides an example of distributed and collaborative leadership in practice.



Improving Communication and Feedback

Recognising the importance of demonstrating how community views influence decisions, the partnership has improved its communications approach. A monthly one-page bulletin is now produced and shared across partners and communities, providing accessible updates on progress and upcoming activity.

The [East Lothian Community Planning Partnership website](#) has also been redesigned to provide easier access to meeting papers, minutes, engagement reports, and the LOIP. Annual reporting has been simplified through the production of both detailed reports and easy-read versions featuring partnership case studies and key achievements. The combination of easy-read bulletins, accessible videos, subtitles, translation options, and simplified annual reports demonstrates a strong commitment to inclusive communication and transparency.

Impact and Challenges

The work has helped establish stronger relationships between communities, elected members and CPP leaders. Community voices are now more visible within governance arrangements, engagement activity is better coordinated, and communication is more transparent and accessible.

The partnership has also demonstrated that large-scale engagement can be delivered in a way that is collaborative and proportionate, while building trust and creating clearer routes for communities to influence priorities and decisions.

The CPP continues to face challenges around staff capacity and maintaining momentum following the significant engagement activity undertaken during development of the LOIP. Partners recognise that engaging over 25,000 people is a significant achievement but also creates an expectation that those voices remain involved and influential over the life of the plan.

There are also ongoing challenges relating to volunteer availability among community representatives and maintaining participation in governance structures.



The next steps

The CPP plans to:

- Finalise and implement the Participation and Engagement Strategy.
- Develop listening networks through Voluntary Centre East Lothian (VCEL) to strengthen ongoing engagement with communities.
- Continue embedding community representatives within governance and decision-making structures.
- Use the new governance arrangements to strengthen accountability, communication, and performance monitoring.
- Continue building trust through transparent reporting on progress and impact.

“Taking part in the self-assessment process and improvement journey has allowed the Board to build trust through action. By creating meaningful opportunities for community representatives to influence decisions, reducing consultation fatigue through our ‘only ask once’ approach and being transparent about what we heard and how we responded, we are creating a Community Planning Partnership that is more inclusive, responsive and community led.”

Emma Brown, Team Manager – Policy, Performance and Service Improvement, East Lothian Council



If you would like more information on this approach, please contact:

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