

## Sefton Borough Partnership

### Sefton Business Engagement & Consultation framework-Position note (November 2009)

*“Local authorities need to adopt a leadership style that engages local partners, builds alliances and secures support for joint priorities. It should facilitate, advocate, arbitrate and influence rather than dominate”*

Source: Lyons enquiry into Local Government

#### 1 Why Engage & Consult?

Business engagement is engrained in many of the council’s day-to-day activities and in more recent years successive EU and UK Government funding has seen more intensive levels of engagement through a range of dedicated regeneration led business support projects and programmes. This has involved the private sector in consultation exercises to help shape these initiatives and develop successful bids for funding. Indeed private sector consultation has become a major requirement of funding bodies and local authorities have to evidence this in their bids for business support funding.

Business representatives on various regeneration boards and panels in Sefton have also become commonplace. They bring with them a wealth of knowledge and business acumen, often sitting alongside local community representatives, and ensure a more inclusive approach to local decision-making.

Sefton Borough Partnership (SBP) has taken this a stage further with the production of “Your Sefton-Your Say”-a Public Engagement and Consultation Framework for Sefton. This sets out a series of standards which partners and stakeholders have agreed to when engaging and consulting with Sefton communities. SBP has tasked its Economic Development and Sustainability (ED&S) thematic group to produce a similar framework for businesses. The following definitions look at both Engagement and Consultation in the context of this framework:

- (i) Engagement usually refers to the engagement of constituents with one another, or with the services of the Local Authority. The initiative for engagement can be either constituent – or Local Authority led and the method of engagements can be through personal contact, online, via events or meetings.
- (ii) Consultation refers to seeking and gathering opinion to help improve, change or endorse services, policies, strategic direction and new proposals of the Local Authority and its partners.

Both words can have different meanings but it is more than simply making information available or gathering opinions and attitudes. We believe it is important to build on the existing good areas of practice of business engagement and consultation so that more Sefton businesses can have their say, get involved in local

decision-making and help improve the services we provide.

## **2 Sefton Borough Partnership-Engagement & Consultation**

SBP believes the engagement of local businesses is crucial to the success of its economic development and sustainability objectives for Sefton. SBP recognises that the council and its partners use a variety of methods to both engage and consult with businesses. The primary route is a partnership arrangement with Sefton Chamber of Commerce.

However the SBP's Business Support Group recognised the need to review and strengthen our overall engagement and consultation strategy and, as a first step, in June 2009 Sefton Council formally endorsed the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) Small Businesses Accord. This is a voluntary code of practice for local authorities in the North West, which seeks to encourage a more productive dialogue with local businesses. The Accord brings together various aspects of consultation best practice to improve the level of participation by businesses in local democracy and decision-making.

SBP recognises the value of Sefton businesses to the economic prosperity and well being of the borough. It has already established a number of engagement and consultation routes for local businesses including the establishment of Sefton Economic Forum and the ' Sefton Business Survey' in September 2009.

The SBP's Business Support Group has also risen to the challenge of improving business engagement and consultation by bringing together key business and employment support providers to help develop a more cohesive approach to delivering services that meet the Government's Business Support Simplification Programme (BSSP) requirements. The following organisations are members of the Business Support Group:

- Invest Sefton-Sefton MBC
- Sefton Chamber of Commerce
- Business Link NW
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Job Centre Plus
- Learning & Skills Council

## **3 Current Approach to Business Engagement & Consultation in Sefton**

Sefton Council engages with businesses on a number of levels ranging from supporting enterprise, growth and inward investment in the borough to statutory requirements such as planning, environmental protection, licensing, trading standards and business rates.

Most departments and functions of the Council also involve businesses in their

decision-making. The Council's economic development service, operated by the Planning and Economic Regeneration Director, has taken its engagement strategy to a higher level because of the need to involve and inform businesses in the economic strategy for Sefton and the wider Liverpool City Region.

Officers are tasked with creating effective links with all sectors of the business community and more importantly bringing together various aspects of consultation and best practice. The Business Development Managers take a proactive approach to engaging with businesses so that they are given the fullest opportunity to participate in the decision making process and to fully understand the reasons behind the final decisions taken.

The following table shows the existing business networks and communication/consultation methods:

<b>Business Network</b>	<b>Membership</b>	<b>Communication/consultation Method</b>	<b>Data held</b>
Sefton Chamber of Commerce & Industry	c. 500 businesses Network attendance averages 100 members per month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business network events (Monthly)</li> <li>• Newsletters</li> <li>• E newsletters</li> <li>• Chamber TV</li> </ul>	Membership database
Sefton Economic Forum	c 600 member database Attendance averages 80 per each qtr event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 events pa</li> <li>• Consult over major strategic projects e.g. LEGI</li> <li>• Joint meetings with North Liverpool Business Forum</li> </ul>	Membership database
The Mersey Partnership/Invest Sefton  Investor Development	Working with Sefton's top 20 Major employers/Foreign owned companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Southport Business Park Executive Club</li> <li>• Aftercare programme supporting re-investment/job safeguarding projects</li> </ul>	Tractivity CRM system
South Sefton Business Forum	c. 300 membership Active membership of about 130 and average 50 members per monthly event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly events</li> <li>• Consult over major strategic projects e.g. SRB, LEGI</li> <li>• Nominates members for steering groups/boards</li> <li>• Presentations on key business issues</li> </ul>	Electronic mailing system
Build Sefton/Stepclever Construction	c 390 membership Active membership of about 100 and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction network meetings</li> <li>• Company registration database</li> </ul>	Construction company database

<b>Business Network</b>	<b>Membership</b>	<b>Communication/consultation Method</b>	<b>Data held</b>
	averages 70 members per event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E newsletters and tender alerts</li> </ul>	
Sefton Business Village Partnership	c. 800 membership comprising 6 BVPs Over arching board and Local BVP sub-groups (Southport, Formby, Altside, Crosby & Waterloo, Bootle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monthly meetings</li> <li>Private Sector board nominated by stakeholders</li> <li>Consultation over major initiatives e.g. highways, developments</li> </ul>	Membership database
Southport Tourism Business Network	c. 110 members	7 sub groups covering General/Travel/Golf/Restaurants/Retail/Events/Conferences & Tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meetings 2-5 times pa</li> <li>Alliance meeting (board)</li> <li>Sub groups</li> </ul>	Membership database  Electronic and post
Mersey Maritime (MM)	c.1000 businesses of which 120 MM members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marketing strategy</li> <li>Board membership</li> <li>Visiting programme</li> <li>Lobbying role eg. Port rates revaluation</li> </ul>	Membership database  Electronic consultation of c. 1000 organisations
Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)	c.1600 members in Sefton and West Lancashire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lobbying role</li> <li>Area meetings</li> <li>Area Managers</li> </ul>	Membership database

The above networks have access to approximately 4,900 businesses. This total does not take account of duplications, or businesses located in West Lancashire through the FSB. Nevertheless, each organisation provides potential access points for consulting up to approximately 40% of the Sefton business community.

#### **4 The Sefton Business Survey 2009**

In June 2009 the Planning and Economic Regeneration Department 's Invest Sefton service commissioned a major independent survey of Sefton businesses, the first of its type in five years. The survey was to help form the basis of new and improved business engagement and consultation in Sefton and to help the council better understand the impact of the recession on local businesses.

The survey was also designed to see what type of help businesses want over the next 12 months to enable Invest Sefton, [Sefton@work](#) and its partners to provide a timely and appropriate response.

A telephone survey of 800 Sefton businesses took place in June 2009. The survey was split between 400 mid/south Sefton businesses and 400 Southport businesses, the latter to help inform the Southport Investment Strategy. A complimentary exercise, carried out simultaneously, involved a mail-out to over 2,000 businesses which contained a business information pack 'Real Help Now' providing details of both local and regional support such as access to finance and grant schemes.

The survey included questions on type of business, location, awareness and evaluation of support received, anticipated growth or decline, business support needs and willingness to be involved in ongoing engagement and consultation. In total 829 questionnaires were received and the results analysed in a final report produced in September 2009.

A key aim of the survey is to improve how Sefton council communicates and engages with its business community and participants were asked about their interest in being involved in future consultation activities. Encouragingly some 78% of the respondents want to have a say in how we develop future regeneration projects. Also 70% want to attend future business network meetings, 52% wish to join Sefton Economic Forum and 27% would like free regular copies of the Invest Sefton newsletter.

It is already clear that there is the potential to work closely with the business community in Sefton, and to develop a range of more cost effective activities including:

- New forms of consultation to increase participation e.g. "virtual consultation panels" to seek contribution to and endorsement of business regeneration projects
- A combined inter-agency database of businesses, broken down into industry sectors and location, for consultation and invitations to events.
- Showing businesses how we have taken their views into account – and if not, why not
- Better feedback to businesses of the performance of support agencies
- Providing a ladder of participation for business people to support the wider community, including participation in the Sefton Borough Partnership.

## **5 Sefton MBC survey of business engagement 2009**

In September 2009 Invest Sefton undertook a survey of key council departments currently engaging with businesses in Sefton. The purpose of this exercise was to see how different departments dealt with businesses and the survey focussed on:

- Frequency of engagement and consultation
- Purpose of engagement and consultation
- Methods used to engage and consult

- Data and information used to engage and consult

The survey was completed on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2009 with 26 initial responses from teams/sections currently dealing with Sefton businesses as part of their core service provision, business support or compliance with statutory requirements

<b>Department</b>	<b>No of sections/teams engaging with businesses</b>
Economic Regeneration	11
Planning	4
Environmental Protection	4
Children Schools & Families	2
Tourism	2
Technical services	1
Housing Market Renewal	1
Finance/Arvato	1

Other key headline responses from teams/sections include:

- 19 have daily regular contact with Sefton businesses
- 15 provide direct support, advice and guidance to businesses
- 10 are involved in joint/public private sector initiatives
- 9 engage and consult with businesses as part of their core service delivery
- 11 consult businesses on a regular basis
- 9 evaluate the impact of their work with businesses through customer satisfaction surveys
- 14 provide and disseminate important information to businesses on a regular basis
- 7 engage with businesses on statutory compliance issues
- 7 engage with businesses for obtain income for Sefton council

In terms of how these teams/sections speak with and listen to businesses the most used method is one to one meetings in either business premises (18) business fora/network events (16) council offices (18) and outreach centres (6). Interestingly only 9 make use of the Council's website with 5 actually having their own individual sites.

The information and data held by team/sections tends to be derived from their own existing databases (14). External databases (6) and web based data (6) are also used for business mail shots or managing networks and events

This initial survey has revealed a wide and varied range of engagement and consultation with Sefton businesses. There is also strong evidence of excellent inter-department joint business engagement work particularly in the Planning and Economic Regeneration Department with, for example, supporting inward investors , developers, a construction charter, an employment charter, business expansions, public realm and town centre initiatives. More recently under the SBP's Economic Development and Sustainability Thematic Group, the Regeneration and Environmental teams from the council are looking at joint working opportunities to

support businesses on climate change and low carbon initiatives.

However there is still much room for improvement and greater connectivity amongst 'business facing' officers across the authority in terms of awareness of respective services, cross referral of customers, shared customer standards, sharing company data, disseminating information and supporting new enterprise and business growth.

## **6 Private Sector involvement and representation**

There is also strong evidence of private sector involvement in council business, particularly around SBP and economic regeneration activities. The strategic focus of SBP has helped foster a greater spirit of cooperation and inclusiveness in the Sefton community with membership from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Historically Sefton economic regeneration programmes and projects have also encouraged this approach and we have had strong private sector representation on various board and steering groups since the inception of Bootle Maritime City Challenge in 1994. This pattern has followed through to the present with South Sefton Partnership, Central Southport Partnership and Netherton Partnership SRB programmes all benefiting from having local business owner/managers actively involved in decision making.

Private sector involvement remains strong in successor programmes such as Southport Partnership and a more recent Local Enterprise Growth Initiative with Liverpool City Council called Stepclever. Together with other business networks such as Sefton Chamber of Commerce, FSB, Sefton Business Village Partnership and Sefton Economic Forum these have continued to provide vehicles for greater business involvement in local decision-making.

Strong examples of this can be found in Sefton's private sector led investment steering groups in the current Stepclever and Working Neighbourhood Funded business projects. Both these groups have private sector representatives from broad range of Sefton businesses. All investment fund awards for new start ups and business growth projects are overseen by these groups, not only to ensure transparency, but also to provide valuable business expertise and experience to support our local based Case Officers. Similar representation can be found on local boards, panels and town centre partnerships.

## **7 Next steps**

A first draft was presented to ED&S on 21<sup>st</sup> October for comment. The same draft was also sent to the 26 respondents who took part in the internal council survey and feedback has now been gathered.

Following a meeting with Jayne Vincent (SBP) on 12<sup>th</sup> November it was agreed that the framework should seek to mirror the Public Engagement and Consultation document with the current first draft being presented to the SBP Executive on 16<sup>th</sup> November for further comment.

A second draft is now underway and the aim is to share this both internally with council departments and externally with stakeholders and partners. It is hoped that a final draft can be shared with the business community in January 2010 leading to a more formal launch at the 8<sup>th</sup> February 2010 Sefton Economic Forum.