

Service Delivery Case Study

Beacon Theme	Sustainable energy
Authority name	Woking Borough Council
Case Study title	Community consultation and engagement

Overview of service delivery

Woking Borough Council has established a role as a strong community leader, which sets the very highest standards in energy efficiency and tackling climate change. However, the Council has sought to 'take the community along with it' and believes community engagement to be vital to ensure others follow its example.

Methodology

Woking benefits from a thriving and committed LA21 initiative, which receives the Council's whole-hearted support, both financially and through contributing officer time. This has enabled LA21 to grow and mature into a well established, high profile and successful community movement. The theme of sustainable energy has been addressed on a number of occasions by LA21 as part of the group's work on raising awareness in the community of the need for more environment-friendly and sustainable living. This has been delivered through advice given in LA21 publications such as the group's newsletter and 'Green Pages' guide to sustainable living. The group has also promoted energy efficiency through displays at public meetings and information stalls in the town centre and elsewhere in the Borough. Woking LA21 has also worked in partnership with the Surrey and East Sussex Energy Efficiency Advice Centre to distribute and undertake surveys on energy efficiency in the home. This has provided participants with individualised reports, identifying a range of home energy-efficiency improvements. Energy efficient light bulbs have been distributed to a great many residents through this work. <http://www.woking.gov.uk/environment/la21>

In Autumn 2005, Woking LA21 published its Greener Homes Guide. This publication provides environmental best practice for home improvements and modifications and further raises the profile of the concept of sustainable development in the wider community. The guide is promoted locally and is available from a range of local outlets, as well as on the Internet. <http://www.woking.gov.uk/environment/la21/greenhome>

When developing its Climate Change Strategy (<http://www.woking.gov.uk/environment/climatechangestrategy>), Woking commissioned independent market research consultants to hold focus groups to ascertain how the public felt about the issue. This revealed that despite high levels of environmental awareness claimed by many of the respondents, understanding of climate change was still very limited and some were sceptical about the causes of climate change. However, there was good support for and recognition of the actions the Council had taken. A key theme in the Climate Change Strategy is "Education and Promotion". This details the Council's commitment to working with schools and ensuring that the wider community understands the Climate Change Strategy through publication of an 'easy-to-read' summary version.

The Council acknowledges that some sustainable energy proposals have the potential to provoke an adverse reaction from some members of the communities they serve. Hence, care has been taken to build an understanding of the concerns that people may have through engagement at an early stage in project development. In 2003 the Council commissioned the Energy Centre for Sustainable Communities (ecsc) to carry out exploratory focus group consultation on the Council's zero waste proposals. ecsc was also commissioned by the Council to carry out research among the local community on opinions and perceptions relating to wind turbines in order to inform the Council's policy development on wind energy. This research demonstrates the Council's commitment to engage the local community in its decision-making and seek to act in an open and transparent manner in

respect of an issue that can be controversial.

Positive learning points

- community consultation and engagement is vital
- by creating greater awareness of climate change and sustainability through education and publicity, the Council can more easily help to bring about change.

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