

## **Community Agreements**

The Welsh Government is committed to ensuring that local people have greater involvement in services in the areas in which they live. There are ways in which local residents can work with service providers such as the local authority, local housing associations, the police and the fire service. A Community Agreement or Neighbourhood Agreement is one way of doing this.

A Community Agreement or Neighbourhood Agreement is a voluntary agreement between local residents and service providers. It helps residents in an agreed area to monitor the services they receive, take responsibility for finding solutions to problems and to improve the services by working with the providers.

Community Agreements set out what people in the area want life in their community to be like. They give residents a say in how issues are tackled and can help build better relationships with local services. They help residents understand the services to which they are entitled and can help secure improvements not only in services but also in the neighbourhood itself..

The information below provides advice and guidance on what you may need to consider when setting up a Community Agreement. It also provides some examples of Community Agreements that have already been introduced between local residents and service providers.

### **Top Tips for a Community Agreement**

Community Agreements vary in who takes the lead in setting them up, the services they cover and what they hope to achieve. Each one is different.

We have identified some key points that any community attempting to develop a Community Agreement may wish to consider. These are:

#### **Before you start**

- Agreements should be led by residents, who should take ownership of them.
- Consider setting out the different ways in which people can be involved and encourage residents to agree to what they would like to do. This allows people to say how they wish to be involved e.g. from delivering leaflets to charring meetings.
- Define your community. Is it a few streets or a whole estate?
- There are already some good examples out there, so do some research to find out if anything else has been developed in other areas. We have provided some examples to help you get started.

- Raise awareness of what you are trying to achieve and involve as many people, groups and organisations as possible that are represented in an area, e.g. local residents, elected members, police, housing providers, local authority staff, local shop owners, community groups etc.
- Include people who are already active or who are committed to the community. The more people and organisations who sign up to the Agreement, the greater the chance of success.
- The police are an important partner. The Neighbourhood Policing Team should be involved as early as possible and should be there throughout.
- Early in the process, involve and clearly define the role of the local councillors or elected representatives. Have a clear communication agreement between the group and elected representatives. .
- Involve local landlords e.g. housing associations and/or the local authority. They will already provide many of the services and will have good links with other service providers.
- Map other local organisations to identify how their services impact on your community. It is likely that many will be involved in the Community Safety Partnership.
- Make links with businesses in the area and include them in the Agreement.
- Community Agreements need to be a true partnership. Residents should feel able to comment on services in a constructive way in order to help improve them.

### **Getting the message heard**

- The Agreement should promote positive and constructive dialogue.
- In order to obtain commitment to the Agreement, ensure you have a good way of communicating with local residents and all members of the group. Some groups call this their public relations or marketing strategy
- Posters advertising meetings should be displayed in popular locations. This provides an opportunity for those residents who are not active in their community to attend.
- Send invitations to all residents who live in the area covered by the Agreement.
- The Agreement should use positive wording that seeks to prevent problems happening in the first place. For example, the police will provide prevention advice and information on property marking to prevent thefts.

- Make sure residents understand what is expected of them. For example, residents should not drop litter.
- Leaflets, flyers and posters should be designed in a way that gives residents a clear understanding of the community is asking of them.
- Be clear. Avoid using words that people may not understand. For example, many residents do not attend 'workshops' as they do not understand what they are and what is required of them.
- Make sure your message is communicated clearly to everyone and ensure that people know who to go to if they have queries or if they want to be involved.
- Advertise the benefits to organisations as well as communities.

### **Steering Group**

Other names for a 'Steering Groups' include Management Committee, Review Panel, Advisory Group. The group can:

- Consider the big picture.
- Monitor current activities against plans.
- Link your Agreement to developments, problems and opportunities in the area.

### **Set up a Steering Group**

- Identify community champions both for now and for the future.
- Local Councillors should be asked to join the group.
- Identify the main decision maker in the other organisations represented. Ask them sign up to forming a Steering Group of service providers. This can help ensure that they will be committed to the project throughout its life. In order for the Agreement to be used as a way of identifying the need for change or improvement in local services, service providers need to be open in their discussions and supportive of the Group.
- Identify people's skills in order to effectively allocate tasks and responsibilities.
- Use training to ensure that everyone has the same opportunity to be involved in the Group, where everyone feels confident about their ability to put their views forward in order to help make a difference.

- Consider having a discussion to help generate an understanding of the problems the community is facing.
- Have realistic aims and objectives which can be met. Think of what success will look like.
- It is important that the Group understands that achieving the difference it wants to see in its community may take some time. It is important that the Group and the community feel that the Community Agreement, or work towards it, is making a difference so that people remain committed to the project.
- Identify 'quick wins' – things that can be easily achieved.
- Ensure there is frequent contact, support and guidance in following the development process. This is essential in order to keep people committed.
- Ensure discussions and decisions are open and honest and that they are communicated to all. This can help prevent personal or other issues delaying the process.
- Don't set too ambitious a timescale as it may hold back the natural development of the Group. However, to ensure a Community Agreement is achieved, the Group should be given firm guidance and an action plan so that it doesn't lose sight of the main goal.
- Those involved in establishing the Group will have a prominent role at the Group's first meeting. After this, however, they should consider stepping back and their ongoing purpose should not be to lead the Group but to support it .

### **Launching the Agreement**

- A good communications plan is important. It will help raise awareness of the Agreement and encourage people to get involved.
- All residents in the area should be provided with a copy of the Agreement or be made aware of where they can get access to it.

### **Evaluating the success of the Agreement**

- The group should decide on how often the Community Agreement should be monitored and reviewed.
- The document should be updated to include new statements when needed.
- At the start of the project, gather information on the how services are delivered in the area - and how satisfied residents are with them. This will allow you to measure the difference the Agreement has made in your community.

- Look at how your services perform compared to other communities, both locally and further afield.
- Check regularly that services are being provided in the way that was established in the original Community Agreement.
- When the Group feels that the Community Agreement has served its purpose and is no longer required, it can be withdrawn. This should be in consultation with the local community.