

Talking, Listening and Working Together – Engagement Findings Report

Introduction

Since 2007, North East Lincolnshire Council (NELC) and the North East Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning Group (NELCCG) have been working very closely together to deliver health and care services in North East Lincolnshire. As this relationship has developed, both organisations looked forward to the next stage to consider how they could be better equipped to deal with the on-going challenges faced by local government and the NHS.

In 2017, the Union Board was established to make the best use of our combined resources and focus to grow and enhance the Place of North East Lincolnshire to improve the health, care and life experiences of our population.

In order to do this we recognise that we need to listen to and involve our communities when we plan and buy local services; and work together to develop the best solutions so we can all live well in North East Lincolnshire.

We initially set out to develop a public and stakeholder engagement strategy for the CCG and council, setting out how the Union will meet its statutory duties around consultation and engagement. However over the last few months this has developed into something far more.

This report outlines how we got there.

Approach

This project has been led by a steering group of council and CCG staff, community members and representatives from VCSE sector organisations.

The CCG's Community Forum and Accord Steering Group have provided advice and constructive challenge over the course of this project.

Starting out

The engagement was launched in September 2018 at the Accord Annual meetings '[Getting Better Together](#)'. Feedback from these meetings indicated strong support for the development of a clear set of 'standards' for how the CCG and other public sector organisations engage with and involve the public in designing their services; and this has been a consistent theme throughout this project.

Over the next few months we visited community groups to find out how they wanted to influence local plans, what puts them off getting involved and what can be done to strengthen the relationships between communities and commissioners. They told us:


- Feeding back and sharing with people the outcomes from engagement were important and this wasn't happening every time

- One size doesn't fit all – we need to listen to communities and provide engagement opportunities that work for them
- People are put off from engaging if they perceive that decisions have already been made so they won't be listened to
- The most positive experiences of engagement have been when communities have worked alongside organisations as equal partners to co-produce plans and solutions
- The ways in which people can influence plans and services is confusing and people are fed up with being asked the same things again and again

Developing the North East Lincolnshire Commitment

Over the course of the summer we held three co-production workshops with members of the NEL VCSE Forum. Together we looked at the feedback we had received and participants shared their experiences of community engagement. The VCSE sector in North East Lincolnshire engage with communities every day and have a wealth of knowledge and understanding of local needs and assets. At these sessions the elements identified to build mutual trust and understanding were:

- Openness and transparency
- Commitment to listen and act on what people have to say
- Feeding back ALWAYS
- Ongoing conversations - taking time to build relationships
- Accessible opportunities
- Be accountable



Consultations happen in hospitals,
conversations happen in
communities

Everyone agreed that we needed a simple statement of principles setting out for how people and communities will be involved in the future so that we make every conversation count in North East Lincolnshire.

The VCSE Alliance also sought assurance from the council and CCG that this would be meaningful and not just a “tick box exercise”. This assurance was given and resulted in the endorsement of the NEL Commitment by the VCSE Forum.

Engagement Activity

In August we published the ‘Talking, Listening and Working Together’ [newsletter](#) which was available digitally, in paper copy and [audio](#). This was distributed to Accord members, residents on the council’s consultations mailing list and was made available in GP centres, libraries and community hubs. Information was sent out to the CCG’s stakeholder lists, elected members and parish councils and VCSE groups and promoted via social media.

This was followed in September with publication of the draft engagement strategy and launch of an online survey inviting people to comment on the strategy. Paper copies were also made available and people were also invited to send in their views by email, letter and contact us by telephone.

A total of **267** people responded to the survey

During August to October members of the Steering group, Community Forum and Accord Steering group carried out engagement with people at:

- Grimsby top town market
- Freeman Street market
- Immingham Civic Centre
- Freshney Green Primary Care Centre
- Cleethorpes Library
- Roxton Practice, Immingham
- Older People's Advice Day – Cleethorpes Memorial Hall
- Centre4
- Community Shop
- Grimsby Institute

We would also like to thank the following groups who have shared their views with us over the course of this project:

- MS Society
- Friendship at Home
- Carers Forum
- Parent Carers Group
- NEL Patient Participation Chairs Groups
- AddAction
- Older People's Health and Wellbeing Group (Collaboratives)
- One Voice Immingham
- Healthwatch Advisory Board
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Executive Board

We also spoke to participants at our Getting Better Together daytime and evening public meetings in September.

Information about the strategy has been circulated to staff via internal communications and discussed at team meetings and 'Lunch and Learn' sessions at the Municipal and Civic offices.

Throughout the development of the strategy, we have been having ongoing conversations with the local community, as well as VCSE organisations in North East Lincolnshire. We received hundreds of comments relating to engagement in North East Lincolnshire including suggestions on how we can improve our activities and how to make opportunities more accessible.

What did people tell us – about the commitment?

When we spoke to people out and about in the community we found many that did not know that they could influence decisions or have their say and welcomed being able to do so. We talked about Talking, Listening and Working Together and asked them what they thought of the commitment. By and large feedback was positive.

This support was also reflected in the survey responses with 94% saying that they agreed that the Commitment was clear and easy to understand, 84% said these were the right commitments and 91% agreed that local groups and organisations who care about the area can and should work to this commitment.

There were similar levels of support for from participants at the ‘Getting Better Together’, however some had reservations about the practical implementation of the principles.

The North East Lincolnshire commitment	
Talking	<p>We will be clear and honest about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ how you can get involved ⇒ what we are doing with what you've told us
Listening	<p>We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ hear your voice and what you have to say ⇒ use what you tell us to bring about change ⇒ be open to be challenged on the way we do things
Working Together	<p>We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ encourage all of our communities to take part ⇒ come to the places where you are ⇒ work together with you and others to make the best use of time and money
<p>Making Every Conversation Count</p> <p>Created by community members, and representatives from the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector working as equal partners with the CCG and council and agreed as the way to do things in North East Lincolnshire</p>	

“Hope it works, can only try”

“They are good principles that make sense”

“Looks nice on here but I doubt it will happen”

“Might be tricky to get the accountability”

“Words are not enough. You need to make the process easy to use”

“Good luck!”

What did people tell us - about Talking

We wanted to gain a better understanding of how we can involve people early and provide better opportunities to get involved. The survey asked- *‘Where should we put our information to help you find out about things that are happening in the area?’*

Social media and email were ranked as the most preferred methods from online participants whereas leaflets in shops, libraries and community venues were the most popular among people who completed paper copy surveys,

In the survey we also wanted to find out if people were aware of the council and CCG’s current ‘You Said – We Did’ feedback mechanisms and 48% of respondents said they were and the majority (58%) felt this means of feedback was enough for

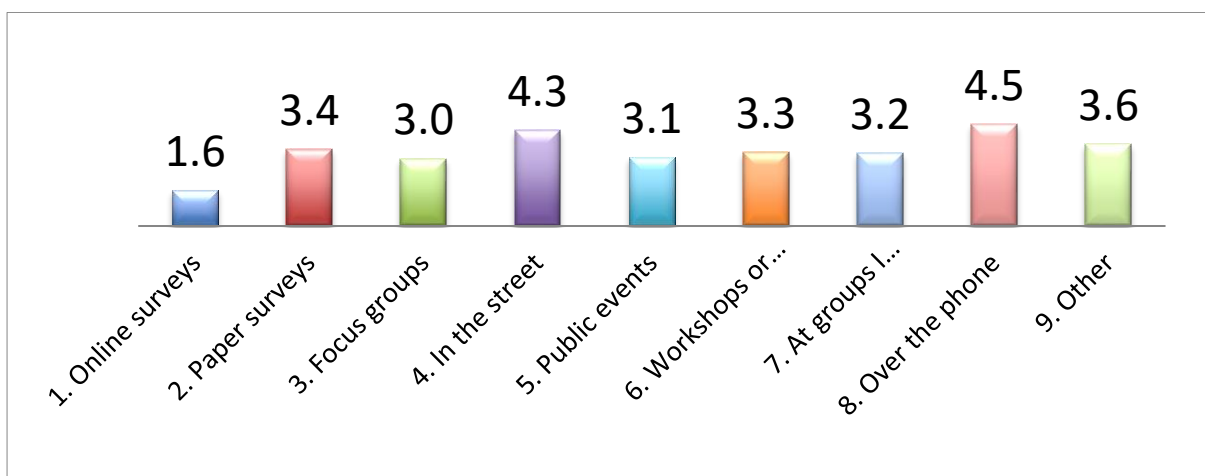
them, however 42% felt we should be feeding back elsewhere'. Comments about how this should be done included:

- Use the same format as when you ask for views
- Newsletter to residents
- Social media including Facebook and use of text alerts
- At venues affected by the changes
- Local newspaper
- Notice boards
- Ward meetings

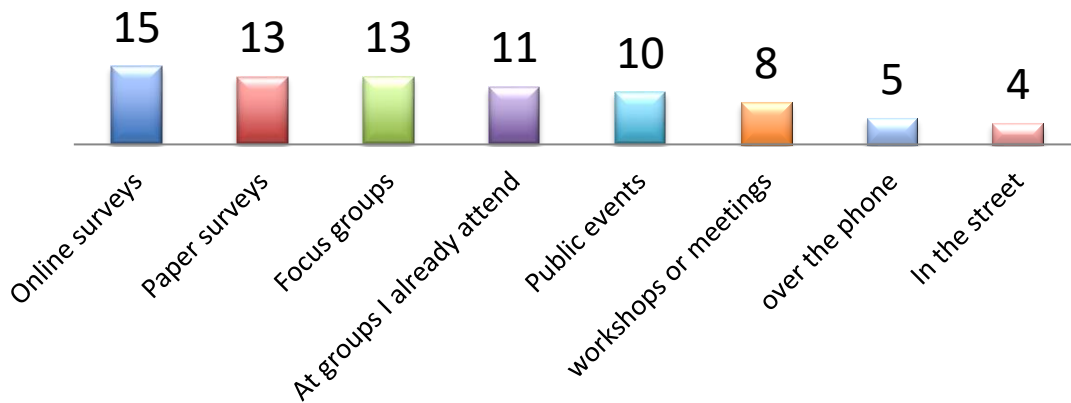
We were able to discuss this in more detail at some of our meetings with community groups. Suggestions on how we can improve the reach of our information included making better use of existing community, social and professional networks.

What did people tell us - about Listening?

We wanted to know how people preferred to give their views. The survey asked people to rank these in order of preference with 1.0 being the best 8.0 the least suitable for them. Not surprisingly online surveys was the most popular amongst people who completed the survey online however online surveys were the most reference option from the paper surveys.



Paper responses preference to having their say



Most of the people responding to the survey said they felt able to give their views when they wanted to.

The most commonly referenced issue was the lack of information. Predominantly respondents not being aware of opportunities to have their say and a few suggesting that they needed more information in order to make an informed decision.

Feedback and what happened as a result is in the forefront of people's minds when considering whether or not to respond in a consultation or to attend an engagement event.

The opportunities that we provide for people to get involved are also referenced, whether it's the time of day, or the format of the event or opportunity. People need to be in an environment they feel comfortable in order to openly provide their views. The opportunity to discuss personally sensitive issues was highlighted as a key issue.

The way we create our surveys and ask our questions can also restrict people from having their say.

Feedback also featured prominently our community conversations with a call for clear and honest feedback of the outcome of activities in a timely manner including what has happened as a consequence as well as what has not, and why.

People recognised that we needed to adapt the method of engagement that we use to the audience and that the best way to do this was to ask people how they wanted to have their say. Making use of technology where appropriate was also highlighted. Suggestions for this included webinars, short videos, mobile App and an online forum to discuss issues.

There are an awful lot of people who haven't got a computer/laptop etc who YOU are missing out

We did receive a lot of feedback about surveys – how they are accessed and content. There were strong views that paper surveys needed to be made available and should not just be online. Long surveys put people off participating and we did receive comments about the wording of questions and the need for people to be able to express their views in open questions.

Ongoing listening to communities was highlighted as key, and people wanted to know what happens to their views about things that are important to them as opposed to what we want to know to inform a specific project or plan.

What can we do to make this better?

Organisations actually listening was important with many not seeing the point of getting involved if nothing changes because of it.

Holding events at times so that repetitive life activities such as work and childcare, or safety concerns about leaving the house on a dark evening are no-longer a barrier to people having their say.

Categories	Count	% of Responses	% of Respondents
Listen	4	14.3	2.2
Different times for engagement	4	14.3	2.2
You said we did	3	10.7	1.6
Open questions	2	7.1	1.1
Sensitive opportunities	2	7.1	1.1
Group sessions	2	7.1	1.1
Email options	2	7.1	1.1
Staff training	2	7.1	1.1
Website	2	7.1	1.1

Challenging us on the way we do things

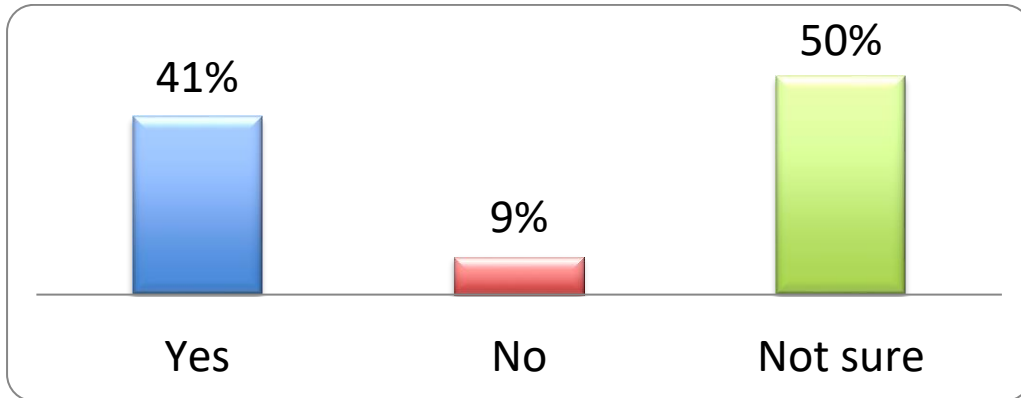
Survey respondent’s preferences for telling us when we get things wrong were email, an online feedback form and over the phone. The current complaints process was referenced and fits well with the way respondents want to register their complaints. People appear to value a dedicated contact to handle their concern before it gets to the complaints stage and to have their query passed on to the relevant department.

What people told us about – working together

When we work together to develop solutions, we want to be confident that none of our diverse communities in North East Lincolnshire are left out of the conversation.

We intend to do this by coming to the places people already use and working to develop links with our lesser heard groups. We asked:

Are there any communities, in North East Lincolnshire, you think we should speak to more?



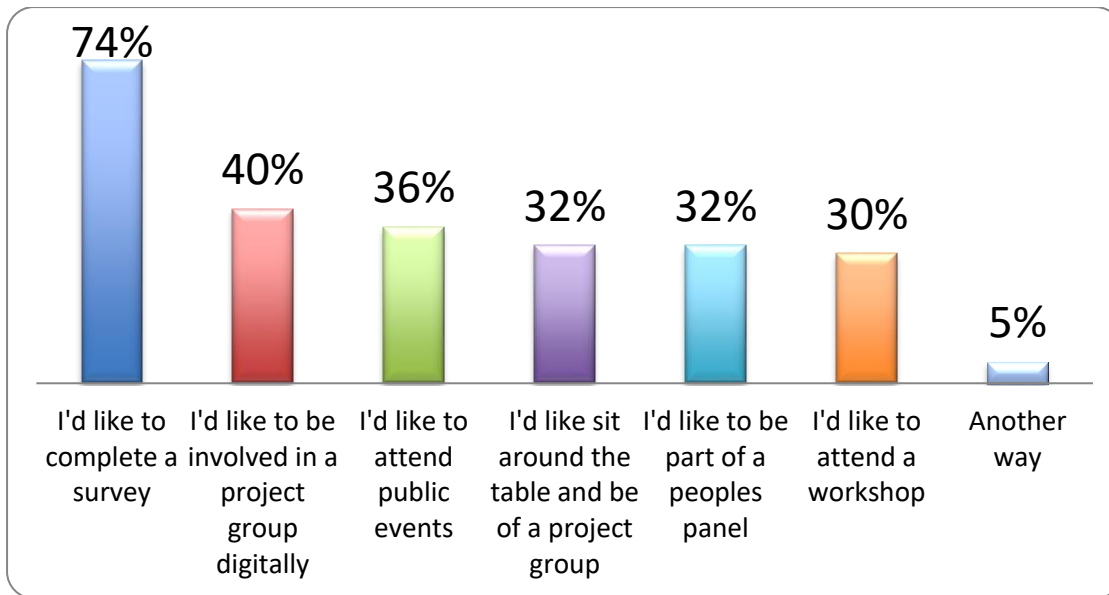
Disadvantaged wards, existing community groups and seldom heard groups are the most commonly referenced communities that respondents think we should be engaging with.

Supporting people to take part by covering travel expenses and holding meetings at appropriate times and venues were seen as ways to reach more diverse audiences.

Examples of engagement opportunities:

- Libraries
- Halls
- Churches
- Public Houses
- Notices in public places
- Posting paper copies
- Interactive social media
- Face-to-face on-street helpdesk
- Attend neighbourhood forums

We wanted to know how people wanted to be involved in working to solve a community issue that affected them.



At the workshops with members of the VCSE Forum participants we discussed what was needed in order to work together effectively for the benefit of our communities. Feedback included:

- Doing ‘with’ – engaging on what the community want – more local
- Right people and partners involved in developing projects
- Co-ordinated approach
- Union has to understand VCSE organisations
- VCSE organisations have a role in identifying issues and solutions.
- Community led initiatives such as community researchers and organisers

We need to see the change in our day to day working; working with communities rather than just a strategy that says the right thing.

The first draft of the Commitment included the line – *We will be clear and honest about - what is possible.*

Participants felt strongly that this was not appropriate and that the Union should not be determining ‘what is possible’ as the VCSE sector may have access to opportunities that public sector organisations do not. Removing this will enable communities to explore what is possible. Talking, Listening and Working Together is about working at Place and its right that this should be removed. Working as equal partners throughout this process the NEL Commitment is our shared statement of intent to work in partnership and improve community engagement in North East Lincolnshire.

When looking at what the strategy was missing a number of suggestions are already included. How we conduct our engagement and provide our feedback were the most important referenced areas. There was some concern expressed that the strategy placed too much emphasis on engagement with groups as opposed to individuals and questioned how accurately a group could represent the views of individuals.

We did receive some feedback that the language used has been difficult to understand in some places however most people were very comfortable with the understanding of this.

Recommendations and next steps

Talking, Listening and Working Together provides an opportunity to transform the way the Union works with people and communities to improve lives in North East Lincolnshire.

There is clear support for both the commitment and the strategy with an acknowledgement that the 'proof will be in the pudding'.

A significant number of the people we have engaged with out in the community were not aware that they could have a say in local developments and issues and more needs to be done to raise awareness of involvement opportunities.

The VCSE sector is a key partner moving forward to drive inclusive and meaningful community engagement.

This engagement has been an opportunity to open the conversation, now we need to move ahead to deliver the commitments of Talking, Listening and Working Together. The next steps to achieve this will be:

- To develop an implementation plan which will be owned by the Engagement Strategy Steering group consisting of members of the community, council and CCG staff and representatives from the VCSE.
- Publish You Said – We Did feedback showing how what people have told us influenced the development of this strategy
- Implement the actions arising from the Equality Impact Assessment specifically targeted work with seldom heard communities to ensure we can be confident that none of our diverse communities in North East Lincolnshire are left out of the conversation.
- Reach out to strategic providers to seek to embed Talking, Listening and Working Together Commitment as the Place approach to engagement in North East Lincolnshire.

Report authors: Sally Czabaniuk, Andrew Dulieu and Jonathan Brooks.

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