

**SUFFOLK POLICE AUTHORITY
AND
CONSTABULARY**

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGY
2007 – 2010**

May 2007

1. INTRODUCTION

Actively engaged communities can contribute significantly to improving policing services, reducing anti-social behaviour and solving crime.

However, communities can only make these contributions if our engagement work is undertaken with a genuine desire to listen and learn.

There is now an explicit emphasis on police responsiveness to the public and on local accountability to the public within the National Community Safety Plan 2006-2009¹ and the Government's white paper 'Building Communities, Beating Crime'².

Furthermore, one of the Police Authority's key functions is to make arrangements for obtaining the views of local people about the policing of their area and gaining their co-operation in preventing crime. The Authority has a range of statutory duties which underpin this function and these responsibilities are laid in various pieces of legislation³.

This Community Engagement Strategy demonstrates the commitment of the Suffolk Police Authority and Suffolk Constabulary to develop a joint approach to engagement with the public to ensure we maximise the benefit to all parties.

Although there is much in common between the Authority and Constabulary roles in respect of community engagement, the two organisations have their own distinctive objectives in this area which are consistent with the corporate aims within the 'Suffolk First For You' programme which aspires to give people a reliable, responsive local service that is visible and accessible, which works with communities and partners to identify local concerns, solve problems and bring offenders to Justice.

The Authority and the Constabulary undertakes engagement activities to promote citizenship and community confidence in order to ensure local people receive the best possible police service, delivered to the highest standards. By gaining a thorough understanding of what the public really need from them, the Authority and Constabulary can design services that meet those needs.

While this joint document sets out the broad objectives, the detailed actions and priority areas will be laid out in annual engagement programmes. Responsibility for delivering these programmes within the Constabulary will lay with Corporate Development and they will be publicly scrutinised by the Authority's Engaging Communities Committee.

¹ National Community Safety Plan 2006 – 09 (page 6)

² Home Office - Building Communities, Beating Crime – a better police service for the 21st century (BCBC)

³ The Local Government Act 1999

³ The Crime and Disorder Act 1998

³ The Police Reform Act 2002

³ The Police Act 1996

2. STRATEGIC AIM

As effective community engagement is important the Suffolk Police Authority's aim is:

“To provide a responsive and accountable policing service, which identifies its priorities through effective and consistent engagement with our communities and partners - involving them, where appropriate, in jointly finding solutions to local problems.”

3. DEFINITION

The definition of a community, for the purposes of this document, is a group of people who hold something in common, such as:

- People who share a locality or geographical place, or
- People who share an identity, for example on the basis of ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, or who share an experience, such as people with a particular disability, or
- Member organisations (e.g. business communities, community groups)

4. PURPOSE

The purpose of this joint Community Engagement Strategy is to achieve the strategic aim and to increase awareness of, accessibility to and confidence in the policing services in Suffolk.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

This strategy will be implemented through the annual Community Engagement Programmes and will be funded through the Police Authority's communication and consultation budget.

6. BENEFITS

Community engagement produces two main benefits: improved decision-making and enhanced citizenship.

Both the Authority and Constabulary focus on the decision-making benefit of community engagement, which also increases levels of trust, confidence and satisfaction in policing within communities.

The Authority's governance and oversight role also calls for a wider perspective that focuses on both the decision-making and the citizenship aspects.

7. POLICE AUTHORITY RESPONSIBILITIES

The Authority has three overarching objectives for community engagement:

- To ensure that its statutory responsibility for engagement are fulfilled.
- To monitor and scrutinise the Constabulary's community engagement activities, as outlined in annual community engagement programmes.
- To promote enhanced citizenship and community confidence in the activities of both the Authority and Constabulary.

The Authority has overall responsibility for ensuring the effective implementation of the joint Community Engagement Strategy. In fulfilling this responsibility, the Authority will assume specific duties for:

7.1 Governance

The Authority has the responsibility for scrutinising and holding the Constabulary to account for its performance.

The Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF), together with the baseline assessment framework developed by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), provide the Authority with an initial framework for measuring, comparing and assessing Constabulary performance with reference to community engagement and citizen-focused policing.

The Engaging Communities Committee has primary responsibility for overseeing this strategy and the engagement programme that supports it and regular monitoring of this area under the 'Engaging Communities Business Plan' agenda item will take place at committee meetings on a quarterly basis.

The Committee also ensures other major change programmes within the Constabulary adopt a citizen-focused approach to their work.

The Community Engagement Strategy is a key component of a citizen focused policing approach, because it underpins the way in which we understand the needs of the public and helps us shape the delivery of policing services.

A nominated Police Authority Member of the Engaging Communities Committee serves as the Lead Member for the Strategy and provides a key point of contact for the Head of Corporate Development in delivering the strategy.

7.2 Strengthening Partnership

In order to enhance local accountability, increase effective partnership working and strengthen local democratic involvement, the Authority fully supports the development of neighbourhood policing.

It also works with local statutory partners to jointly enhance the capacity for engagement and ensure community engagement activities are compliant with legislation, particularly on equality and diversity issues and are inclusive of all sectors of Suffolk's population.

7.3 Community Engagement at County Level

The Authority is working to strengthen the use of community engagement to inform the decision-making processes within the Constabulary and partner organisations, through building better working links with other organisations.

It is using vehicles, such as public surveys, to gather information about the public's perceptions and opinions on policing matters, which are used internally and shared with partners to inform decision making.

Similarly, it ensures a county-wide perspective by accessing information and community research carried out by partners and other agencies and ensuring this is fed into Authority's and Constabulary's planning and decision-making processes.

7.4 Serving Diverse Communities

Suffolk is home to a rich diversity of communities, which share various characteristics including ethnicity, faith, nationality and language.

There are also communities which experience greatly different crime and safety levels, so also have differing policing needs based on their experiences and on their age, gender, sexual orientation or mental and physical ability.

Further layers of diversity, which impact on policing and methods of community engagement, include the complex differences in people's values, beliefs, lifestyles and levels of disadvantage or deprivation.

The evolving nature of Suffolk's communities means the engagement processes need to be monitored and regularly reviewed by the Authority to ensure they are relevant, equitable and accessible to all sections of the population.

7.5 Strengthening the Community's Voice

Successful community/police engagement is a two-way process that requires residents who are well informed, willing and able to get involved.

The Authority recognises and actively supports the high level of commitment by local people in providing an effective independent voice for their communities, assisting in making the police accountable and responsive to local needs.

These responsibilities support the Authority's primary governance and scrutiny responsibilities, as well as enhancing the quality and standards for public participation through increasing partnership work, devolving decision making and strengthening local democratic involvement in policing.

8. CONSTABULARY RESPONSIBILITIES

The Constabulary's overarching aim is to use community engagement to inform its decision making to ensure it provides citizen-focused policing, which meets the needs of Suffolk people.

8.1 Ensuring Capacity and Capability

Capacity and capability refer to the Constabulary knowing what to do, how to do it and having the appropriate skills and resources to carry out community engagement to a high, professional standard.

8.2 Embedding Community Engagement

As well as ensuring the Constabulary has the capability to carry out community engagement, it is also actively working to embed engagement within its culture – ensuring staff realise the importance of listening to and meeting the needs of local communities.

8.3 Governance

The implementation of this strategy is dependent on continued high level support from within the Constabulary. The Head of Corporate Development has responsibility for the delivery of the strategy through internal Constabulary governance structures.

9. RISK

The Authority has a statutory duty to obtain the views of local people about the policing of the County. Failure to do so may lead to the public feeling they are not being consulted about service delivery (particularly “hard to reach” groups) and the Authority would be in breach of legislation. The Engaging Communities Committee will monitor this risk through its quarterly review of its business plan.