

Sandwell Community Engagement Strategy

Incorporating the

**Joint Work Programme
for
Working with Communities**



Foreword

Sandwell has a rich history of actively working with its diverse communities. We know that communities can be of **Place** or people within a defined geographical area such as the Tantany, Old Hill or Friar Park

We also know that communities of Interest are **People** who share a particular experience or characteristic, such as young people, faith groups, and older people, disabled people, and ethnic groups or lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

Communities may define themselves and definitions do change, people often belong to more than one community and communities themselves are often very diverse. Sandwell has one of the most diverse range of communities in the country. This is a great asset to the borough bringing with it creativity, talent and vitality and makes the task of engaging with the borough's community even more important.

Sandwell Partnership in it's role as the Local Strategic Partnership understands the need to harness this creativity, vitality and talent and is working to develop a consistent approach to engaging communities across the borough.

Gary Bowman
Sandwell Partnership

Introduction

This Community Engagement Strategy has been developed for those of us in the statutory sector that have a duty to engage with Sandwell's residents about the services we provide. We want this strategy to give our communities and us, a clear understanding of engagement activity happening across the borough and the opportunities to influence services. This Engagement Strategy is a collaboration between Sandwell MBC, Sandwell Homes, the Police, the Voluntary Sector and Sandwell Primary Care Trust. This strategy underpins the Sandwell Plan and is a key element of the Neighbourhood Strategy. It responds to the local government white paper Strong and Prosperous Communities, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill, Every Child Matters and supports the delivery of the Governments place shaping agenda. The strategy also responds to the recommendations of the select committee on community cohesion. Within this context it seeks to align the community engagement strategies of our housing partners, local authority departments, the Police and the PCT.

This strategy builds on the work already underway in the Borough to engage residents in determining how services are provided. It uses the Sandwell Partnerships Working with Communities Framework to set out the environment within which community engagement activity across the borough will happen in the period 2008 to 2011. The responsibility for making this strategy work rests with all the partner organisations within Sandwell Partnership who have signed up to this way of working.

Why a Shared Strategy?

Community engagement in Sandwell is about making sure that residents and service users can participate and engage in a range of different ways to improve services and influence change to make the borough a better place to live and work. At the heart of community engagement is the development of relationships, a commitment to open and honest communication, a willingness to listen and an understanding of the diverse needs of people and the places in which they live.

Therefore:

The development of this strategy centres around **three** key aims to be taken on board by statutory, voluntary and private sector partners:

1. We will put people at the heart of what we do.

- We will do this by reaching out to communities and individuals not currently engaged
- We will offer a wide range of engagement opportunities through appropriate structures, mechanisms and resources that reflect our cultural heritage and which allows us to work effectively with our communities
- We will empower our communities by listening and acting on issues and concerns raised

2. We will work together in order to reduce duplication of effort and unnecessary demands on our communities.

- We will do this by developing a consultation database that logs partner activity to make sure engagement and consultation activity across our towns is co-ordinated. We will also share information and open up our processes and consultation plans to each other
- We will continue to work in partnership to ensure a consistent and co-ordinated approach to engaging communities
- We will use traditional, innovative and creative ways including new technologies and the media to engage with our communities
- We will develop joint working arrangements for community development activity across the borough
- We will develop the practitioner networks across all six towns to share and build on good practice in engaging communities

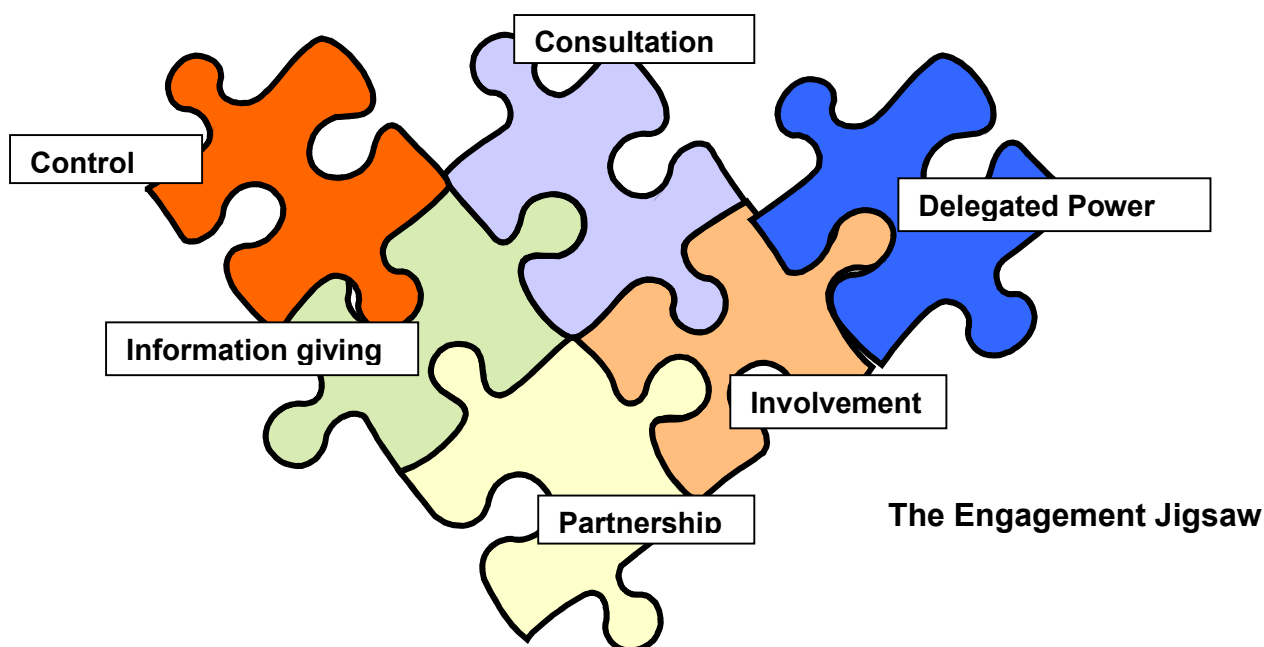
3. We will involve residents at all stages of any development, design, delivery and review of services and we will demonstrate that their opinions are taken on board.

- We will commit to providing appropriate training, resources and development for staff so that resident involvement becomes an intrinsic way of working
- We will develop the best practice toolkit to ensure we use appropriate methods when engaging local people
- We will have clear objectives for engaging the community and communicate clearly and openly about decisions and actions taken

Community Engagement in Sandwell

Community 'Engagement is about making sure that people can participate and engage in lots of different ways to make Sandwell a better place to live, work and play. Community engagement can happen in many ways from 'Citizens' Panels' and focus groups to questionnaires, Planning for Real, vox pop and graffiti walls and Mobile phone texting. Engagement can take place at local "fun days" or community events, local carnivals or borough wide events such as the Sandwell Show. There are different ways that community engagement can be illustrated such as the use of Arnstein's Ladder of Participation or the Wheels of involvement used in tenant participation.

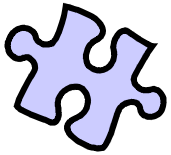
We have chosen to use the Engagement Jigsaw below to show the levels and interaction of community engagement strands that are used in the borough and the outcomes for service providers using one or more of these methods.



Information giving

This involves giving information about issues or services to the community. This could include the use of newsletters, websites, leaflets, posters, meetings etc to raise awareness or keep people informed.

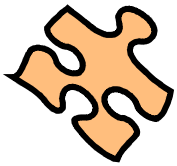
The outcome of this will be that residents will have the relevant information. In order for the information to be used by residents in a meaningful way the service area will have entered the next stage of the engagement process.



Consultation

Consultation is work that is led by an agency with the community as users of the service or facility, in order to gain feedback about the service provided. The agency follows priorities already set, or cascaded down from central government but asks the community for their views within the boundaries of those priorities. The community may be given a set of options to choose from.

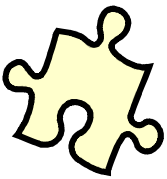
The outcome of this will be limited to the information parameters given but it can provide the opportunity for the community to influence and change Services.



Involvement

The community are involved as joint planners and joint decision makers about particular activities or strategies at a very early stage. It is about enabling and empowering the community or individual to achieve their own goals, so that they are involved at all levels of the organisation, or service, including management.

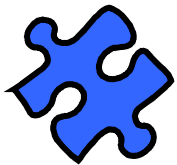
The outcome of this will be that you have a collective of individuals who have interest in a particular area of a service. They will be committed to service improvement, they will have ownership of particular areas of service and they will add value and commit their time to service.



Partnership

Where it is clearly demonstrated that residents have a 'voice at the table' and are equal players on decision-making boards or forums with shared risks and outcomes.

The outcome of this will be that you have a group of individuals who have given their commitment to an area of service provision. It has the advantage of having a 'community perspective' around the table and individual representatives have the opportunity to input into decisions and to challenge decision makers in a meaningful way.



Delegated Power

Communities have been given the responsibility of planning and or decision making about specific activities or strategies at all stages. There is a strong element of enabling the community or individuals to achieve their own goals, so that they are empowering to make decisions

The outcome of this will be that you have a collective group of decision makers who live and work within the community and this can respond to community needs on a more localised basis. This type of control is more common in the housing field where tenants choose to manage a group or estate of houses.



Control

The Community have delegated control for planning and or decision making for specific areas and strategies at all stages. The community have been empowered to achieve their own goals by running an organisation or activity.

The outcome of this is that there is a collective group of decision makers who live and work within the community. This type of control is commonly found in housing co-operatives where residents are shareholders in the housing collective.

The best practice 'tool kit' will detail a range of innovative activities that can be carried out by partner organisations to engage Sandwell's' community.

How are we Working Towards our Objectives?

Building the capacity of local people

By working to build the capability, competence, confidence and leadership of individuals and groups so that they can realise their opportunities to become involved and have a role ensuring their neighbourhoods, towns and the borough are safe, clean and aspirational places to live.

We will build on the good practice of our work with.....

The Six Housing Service Panels in Sandwell, one for each of the borough's towns, meets a minimum of four times a year, to receive information on how housing providers are performing and to provide a view on different housing-based issues. The meetings are arranged and supported by officers from Sandwell Homes, whilst the Tenant Chair and the Sandwell Homes Housing Area Manager locally determine the agenda for meetings. This local model is replicated when each Housing Service Panel elects members to an over-arching borough-wide Panel that provides the tenants voice on borough wide policy developments and issues.

Housing Service Panel membership is made up primarily of Council tenants, but other residents are also encouraged to attend, so that the panel can encompass wider community issues, such as anti-social behaviour and street cleansing.

Through their work on the panels a number of residents have developed their confidence, skills and knowledge to such an extent they have now been elected to sit on the board of Sandwell Homes, which oversees the running of the borough's housing stock. Panel members have also become involved in the Partnership Stakeholder Panels, which oversee the implementation of the £425million Decent Homes programme.

Through their knowledge gained as panel members, tenants have become empowered to act as tenant inspectors. This involves looking at how frontline services respond to the needs of customers and is done through reviewing cases, shadowing officers and acting as mystery shoppers to see how customers are dealt with on the phone.

Enable residents to influence decision-making

By providing the opportunities and structures that enable members of the community to get involved and voice their opinions, concerns and to have access to decision makers. For example forums such as the six towns based Housing Panels, Neighbourhood Forums, Parents Forums and the Primary Care Trusts Patient Public Involvement Forums.

We will build on the good practice of our work with.....

Patient and Public Involvement Forums (PPI Forums) are groups of volunteers dedicated to shaping and improving health services. Forums have specific powers to work with the NHS and other public health bodies. They work with the public to find out what people really want from their services, and monitor, investigate and advise the NHS in order to provide a service based on what people need.

PPI Forums are independent bodies, created in law with powers over the NHS. The PPI Forums ensure that there is a formal and legal way for members of the public to investigate and influence health services relevant to them. In Sandwell the work of the PPI Forum is based on an annual work programme agreed at its AGM.

One of the topics on our programme is to encourage and monitor the implementation of the National Service Framework (NSF) for Long Term Neurological Conditions, which was launched in March 2005. One of the ways in which the PPI Forum members felt they could influence the NSF at a local level was to put in place regular workshops with local people who have neurological conditions. The workshops also included members of the Forum and other key stakeholders including the Strategic Health Authority, Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital Trust and Sandwell Primary Care Trust (PCT) etc. By bringing stakeholders together in this way the PPI Forum could ensure that local people with neurological conditions were given the opportunity to share their experiences of local health and social care services with those who commission, provide and regulate services.

Other successful pieces of partnership work where residents are able to influence decision making include the completion of a Sandwell wide Rehabilitation Review which will form the basis of the PCT's Rehabilitation Strategy, the work around foot health, care pathways, the Annual Healthcare Declaration and the red tray system in hospitals, which was designed to identify vulnerable patients in unable to feed themselves.

Build better relationships between communities

Sandwell has a diverse community and we will provide and support opportunities for different communities of interest to work, live and socialise together in harmony and mutual understanding. We will provide and support opportunities for different community activities that help to foster a sense of the community. We currently support local carnivals, fun days, town and borough wide events.

We will build on the good practice of our work with.....

Sandwell Multi Faith Network, which provides a vehicle that brings together all borough wide faith, based groups. The network has worked on projects to commemorate the incidents that took place on 7th July. The 7:7 Multi-Faith concert in 2005 and its successor in partnership with Sandwell Together in July 2006 attracted people that represented the broad range of ethnicity, age and faith diversity within the borough.

Almost all those who attended the events commented that they had gained new understanding and increased confidence to communicate and socialise with, people from other faith backgrounds.

The Multi Faith Network has also been involved in developing protocol arrangements and promoting opportunities for Sandwell's children to socialise and be educated in a way, which permits equal respect for all faiths. In this way the Network can contribute towards the building of better relationships between people of different faith and no faith communities. Ensuring a cohesive approach is adopted by Sandwell's next and future generations of residents.

Keeping people informed

Service providers will keep residents informed of changes to services and will consult residents on standards of service provision. We will provide an annual statement of how services will be provided and how these will be monitored across partner agencies through the Town Charters delivered to all households.

We will build on the good practice of our work with.....

Town Charters set out the promise from Sandwell MBC and our partners about the type, frequency and quality of service residents should expect from us. The Charter has been developed as a direct result of listening to our communities who sometimes found it difficult to know which service area to contact when a problem arose and who told us the main things you wanted us to fix or make better.

The Charter responds to your comments by setting out the standard of service the community should receive from each service around keeping streets well lit and safe, keeping towns clean and tidy, helping residents to feel safe in their neighbourhood, town and borough and the opportunities provided by our leisure and entertainment facilities that add to residents quality of life

Develop trust between service providers and the community

We will develop existing channels of engagement so that opportunities are maximised for providers and communities to come together and work on issues.

We will build on the good practice of our work with.....

Skills Link Tibbington – Raised aspirations and challenged expectations within the local community by supporting a middle aged resident who had not been engaged with service providers since leaving school. She is a mother of four and grandma to six, and had always been employed in low paid low skilled jobs.

After she met Skills Link at a local community event in 2006 she expressed an interest in community learning at a local venue. At the time she didn't feel that she had the confidence to go to college to study. A relationship was built up a worker having regular sessions with her and she was eventually helped by being set up with a flower arranging course at Summerhill Primary School, which she attended with her daughter and daughter-in law.

After completing the course at the end of November all three learners were encouraged to apply to the Bursary Fund to start studying at Dudley College to gain a City & Guilds, Level 1 in floristry. Over the year the ladies have voluntarily donated their time, effort and skills to produce floral tributes for events and residents in the community and have acted as ambassadors for Skills Link. The ladies showed their enthusiasm for flower arranging on recent visit to Malvern Flower Show and shared with the rest of the group hints and tips on how some of the spectacular displays had been achieved.

They have now enrolled to complete City & Guilds, Level 2 in floristry in September, which will enable them to start working once completed.

The family have continued to take part in other local learning opportunities provided by Skills Link such as 'Beauty' and have introduced the organisation to the rest of their family by attending Family Learning sessions including 'Healthy Cook and Eat', Arts and Craft sessions and sewing classes and have worked to produce a themed float for the Tipton Carnival.

Solving local problems

The neighbourhood, town and borough tasking processes enable service providers to listen to the needs of the community around anti social behaviour, nuisance and crime and respond in a multi agency way to residents concerns. We will provide frequent opportunities for residents to talk to service providers in their neighbourhoods.

We will build on the good practice of our work with.....

Town and Neighbourhood Tasking. We are committed to solving local problems faced by people living in the borough's neighbourhoods and towns. A multi agency group including agencies such as the Police, Sandwell Homes, Town Teams, Street Wardens and the Youth Service etc are tasked with identifying, resolving and monitoring issues of anti social behaviour, vandalism and nuisance within each of the borough's neighbourhoods.

Each neighbourhood is assigned a lead officer from one of the partner agencies, who acts as a conduit for information and issues are resolved by a partnership approach at the local level. On a fortnightly basis all partner agencies come together on a town wide level to work on issues that cannot be resolved at the neighbourhood level or that affect the town as a whole.

Residents are encouraged to get involved in solving local problems and having a say on how money is spent by attending quarterly Neighbourhood Forum meetings to receive feedback on previously identified problems and bring new issues to the attention of service providers. Four walkabouts a year are arranged in each neighbourhood that give residents an opportunity to point out areas for improvement within their community to partner organisations.

Build effective working relationships between service providers

We are working together in a number of ways to bring about positive changes for local people in how we consult, engage and respond to your issues. We do this by sharing our consultation plans and make the results of all consultation available by publishing these on our Consultation Database.

We will build on the good practice of our work with.....

The Consultation Database, which has been developed for use by all statutory, partners working with communities in Sandwell. The database developed by Research Sandwell, allows us to work together in a co-ordinated way to make sure engagement and consultation activity across our towns avoid duplication and learn lessons about the best ways to engage with our communities.

In working together we will avoid consultation overload in particular areas of the Borough or sections of the population, and we will deliver better value for money because some activities can be grouped together into one event or survey.

This web-based database allows our organisations such as the Primary Care Trust or Sandwell Homes, to enter the details of any consultation, engagement or participation activity we are proposing and includes the;

- The type of activity being undertaken
- Relevant contact names
- The costs associated with consultation
- The population and geographical area to be targeted

Project plans, questionnaires and final reports of the initiative can also be entered onto the database making as much detail as possible accessible to us and interested parties. The database can be searched at any time to find out about activities being conducted within neighbourhoods, towns or the borough.

Implementing the Strategy – How will we Deliver?

The outcome of our work with residents has shown us that people see their communities and the neighbourhoods where they live as whole entities. When residents engage with us as service providers they want us to work together to resolve issues that affect the whole community, not just our own service areas, thus our work is about providing sustainable and equitable outcomes for residents.

We propose to develop a phased approach to co-ordinating the work of practitioners who work with communities across the six towns of Sandwell. A key objective of town and neighbourhood working is the ability to harness the resources present at local level in order to reduce duplication of effort, provide a consistent way of working with communities and enable the most effective use of partners staffing resources. We seek to do this by developing joint work streams where community development practitioners will work in a co-ordinated and sometimes systematic manner across neighbourhoods and towns to bring about equitable, relevant and sustainable change and growth.

Why the need for a Joint Work Programme

There are a number of factors to be taken in to account in developing a joint approach to community development activity across Sandwell's six towns and the borough:

- The Local Government White Paper and the introduction of Local Area Agreements LAA's, both show a clear focus on resident involvement, engagement and empowerment through decision-making processes.
- Reduce duplication of activity by partner agencies in the same localities and within the same timescales.
- Introduction of the six Town Charters emphasises community responsibilities and their involvement in monitoring service provision.
- Implementing recommendations in the Cattle report into Community Cohesion in the borough and Sandwell MBC's Select Committee Report on Community Cohesion.
- There already exists a track record of collaborative working amongst community development practitioners across the six towns as demonstrated by the activities currently taking place in Practitioner Groups.
- Provides the opportunity to align organisational priorities and resources across a number of services.
- All organisations would benefit from the sharing of data, skills and knowledge as demonstrated by the success of the town and neighbourhood tasking process.

The Future for Working with Communities in Sandwell

In Putting People at the Heart of What we do we propose to develop community development joint working arrangements which will see organisations within the statutory sector, in the first instance, linking their community engagement and community/partner capacity building priorities to achieve joined up delivery, reduce duplication of service and provide benefits from sharing data and resources.

We will reshape the Practitioner Groups in the six towns to have a co-ordination function for community development and engagement practices within each town to drive forward this joint agenda. The six Practitioner Groups would be serviced by the three Town Community Development Officers, and would look to develop areas of joint working in order to **Reduce duplication of Effort and Unnecessary Demands on Our Communities**. This work might include the elements listed at Fig 1 as well as other areas still to be determined.

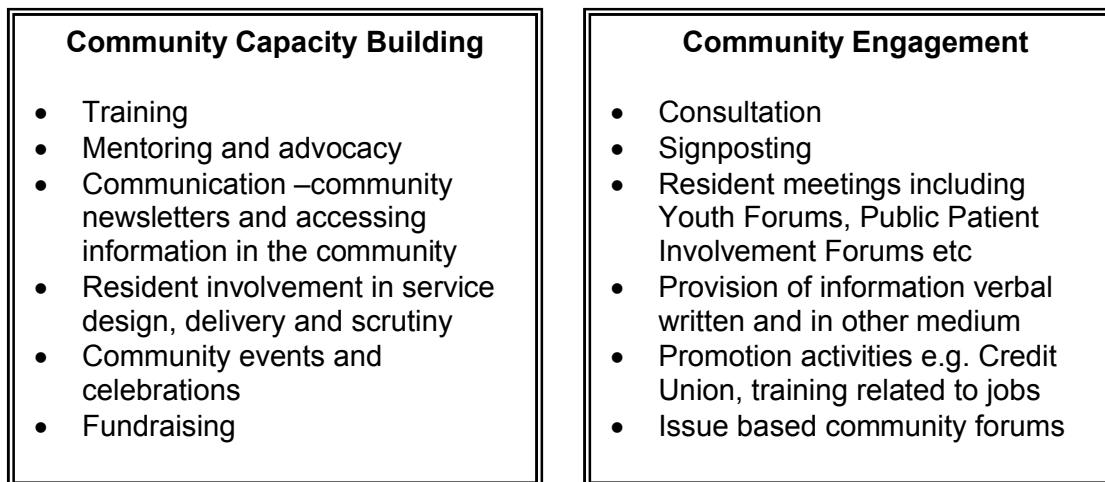


Fig. 1 Community Development Shared Work Strands

The development of joint work streams across the six towns will be underpinned by our shared values, principles and processes and **our commitment to involving residents at all stages of any design delivery and review of services and take on board opinions.** It will acknowledge and build on current good practice and will encompass:

- An acknowledgement of different agencies pressures and priorities
- Process will start with the communities own needs and priorities by working with residents not dictating the agenda
- A willingness to be open and honest about the extent of influence communities can have
- Encouraging communities to work collectively
- Respecting and valuing diversity and difference
- Challenging oppressive and discriminatory actions and attitudes

Working Arrangements

In order to achieve a joined up approach to this shared work programme the process will be led by a strategic 'community development partnership' of relevant agencies to work as a co-ordinating vehicle to ensure agreed principles and processes are applied systematically across the six towns. This partnership will look at the co-ordination of shared involvement activity and will report to the Partnership on town-based activity. In addition it will also look at:

- Staff training – to enable staff to carry out meaningful consultation and engagement activities

- Establishing a 12-month rolling programme of co-ordinated community development activities to promote community involvement across partner agencies and the voluntary sector.
- Develop a performance management framework for measuring community involvement and community capacity building activities across all partners.
- Bring the local authority consultation database into the partnership arena so that it becomes a web-based resource that is accessible to all partners but would be updated through the work being done at town level within practitioner groups.

Our Partners

There are different partners involved in implementing this strategy:

- All residents of Sandwell
- Councillors as elected representatives of their communities
- All members of Sandwell Partnership which delivers the vision and community strategy for Sandwell (and includes members such as Sandwell Homes, Primary Care Trust, the Police, housing associations, Fire Service, Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations, Race Equality Sandwell, Connexions, Sandwell Communication and Information Participation Service SCIPS, Sandwell College and others)
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council through services provided by areas such as Housing Strategy, Community Services, Youth Service, Libraries, Children Young People Services, Adult Services and Town Teams.
- The wider community and voluntary sector
- Private sector organisations, local businesses and social enterprises

The outcome of service providers and service commissioners adopting this way of working will result in thriving, sustainable and empowered communities.

Source Documents

1. Working with Communities - A Shared Framework for Members of Sandwell Partnership
Publisher: Sandwell Partnership 2003-4
2. The Community Development Challenge
Publisher: Dept for Communities and Local Government 2006
3. Tenant Participation Agreement
Publisher: Sandwell MBC - 2008
4. PCT Engagement Strategy
Publisher: Sandwell Primary Care Trust 2007
5. Children and Young People Participation Strategy
Publisher: Sandwell MBC 2007
6. Strategic Framework for Community Development
Published: SCCF Standing Conference for Community Development 2001
7. Consultation Strategy
Publisher: SMBC Research Sandwell 2007
8. Sandwell Compact – Defining Relations Between voluntary and Community Sector and Other Members of the Sandwell Partnership
Publisher: Sandwell Partnership 2004
9. Community Involvement Strategy
Publisher: SMBC Housing Strategy Division 2004
10. All Of Us Building Cohesion Between Towns and Communities: a narrative for Sandwell
Publisher: Institute of Community Cohesion 2006
11. Tenant Involvement Strategy 2007 - 2009
Publisher: Sandwell Homes 2007