

decision making and community participation

Creating sustainable communities

The last biennial citizenship survey¹ published concluded that “There were strong associations between participation in civil renewal activities... and feeling able to influence decisions in the local area.” Hertfordshire continues to explore ways to encourage participation, including events around the Local Democracy week and working with the local community to develop its services and Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

Engaging the local community and providing things that will improve their quality of life is almost as challenging as addressing climate change. Yet Hertfordshire Forward, our Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), addressed both these issues at its annual conference. The current LAA, meanwhile, uses other tools, such as the ‘Valuing Volunteers in Hertfordshire’ campaign, to encourage citizens to participate in local decision-making through volunteering. The scheme offered opportunities in victim support, lay magistrates, special constables, prison visitors, trustees, mentors and school governors.

Indicator DM1 - Electoral Turnout (average % turnout for Hertfordshire Local Councils)²

The county’s local elections were held 3 May 2007 and turnout ranged between 31.12% to 41.99%. This was again lower than the previous year when turnout ranged from 33.7% to 45.3%. This may be due to not all councils holding elections and because turnout is usually higher in general elections.

Indicator DM1 - Electoral Turnout (average % turnout for Hertfordshire Local Councils)	
Local Authority	% Turnout May 2007
Broxbourne	31.12
Dacorum	37.95
East Hertfordshire	36.10
Hertsmere	31.38
North Hertfordshire	38.48
St Albans	41.99
Stevenage	36.90
Three Rivers	36.03
Watford	pending
Welwyn Hatfield	33.03

Source: District Election Officers October 2007

Local Democracy Week

In 2007 Local Democracy Week was held 15-21 October to celebrate democracy and highlight local government work³. Every year hundreds of events are organised across the country to encourage young people to become involved in local decision making. Events in the county included Three Rivers District Council inviting pupils from St Joan of Arc School to a Council Chamber Open Day where Recycling, Leisure and Community Safety Staff ran a Councillors’ Question Time session, fun quizzes and presentations on their work in the local community.



Pupils from St Joan of Arc School Rickmansworth visited Three Rivers District Council Chambers during Local Democracy Week.

Community Strategies, Plans and LAAs

The Local Government Act 2000⁴ placed a duty on local authorities to prepare community strategies. The local government White Paper ‘*Strong and Prosperous Communities 2006*’⁵ has since called for local authorities to develop Sustainable Community Strategies. These should clearly set out the area’s vision and be supported by all of its partners, stakeholders and the community. The Local Government White Paper also introduced a new series of LAAs. These are three-year contracts between central and local government designed to improve public services by bringing organisations together locally.

Hertfordshire’s first LAA (2006-2009) contained 79 targets with 31 ‘Performance Reward Grants’ attached. This is where a financial reward is paid by central government in return for performance above the normally expected level. The potential value of this reward to Hertfordshire is £30m, is paid upon meeting targets at the end of the LAA and reinvested.

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Hertfordshire Community Plans and Strategies
Broxbourne Community Plan 2007-9
Dacorum's Community Plan: Dacorum 2015 - A Better Borough
East Herts Together - Community Strategy 2003
Hertsmere Together Community Strategy 2006-2020
Community Strategy for North Hertfordshire - Nov 2003
St Albans and District Community Strategy: Shaping Our District Together for 2020
Stevenage 2021: Our Town - Our Future
Three Rivers Community Strategy 2006-12
Watford's Community Plan 2006-2026
Welwyn Hatfield 2015 - The Borough's Corporate & Community Plan: Putting People First
Hertfordshire Forward Community Strategy 2008-2021
Source: Hertfordshire Local Authority Websites September 2007

action in disadvantaged and deprived areas and is linked to the East of England Plan. In developing the strategy, Hertfordshire Forward conducted detailed research⁶ of the community's needs and held a series of workshops and scoping sessions. The strategy was previewed at the Annual Conference on 26 October 2007⁶ where the LSP chairman presented draft actions and these 9 key themes:

1. Jobs, Prosperity & Skills
2. Safer and Stronger Communities
3. Children & Young People
4. An Ageing Population
5. Health & Wellbeing
6. Affordable Housing & Quality Neighbourhood
7. Transport & Access
8. Sustaining Hertfordshire's Unique Character & Quality of Life
9. Promoting Sustainable Development

A year into the LAA and Hertfordshire has delivered some excellent results on both 'reward' and 'non-reward' targets. For example;

- **Economic Development and Enterprise**
there was a significant rise in the number seeking business start-up advice with more going on to establish a new business in the county
- **Children and Young People**
more schools achieved 'healthy schools' status and more children participated in physical activity
- **Safer and Stronger Communities**
the Herts Home Security Survey revealed that those receiving this service felt safer in their neighbourhood and less were concerned about crime than before
- **Healthy Communities and Older People**
more older people benefited from intermediate care with a greater number over 45 receiving advice on staying fit and keeping healthy

Hertfordshire's new Sustainable Community Strategy⁶

Hertfordshire Forward's Sustainable Community Strategy will be finalised by Spring 2008. Providing a framework for long term (2008-2021) and short term actions (2008-2011), the new strategy uses the LAA to deliver the short term actions. Designed to improve quality of life in the county, the strategy prioritises

This year's conference theme was **Climate Change** - for more details turn to that section.

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David Woollcombe of Peace Child International: one of several speakers at Hertfordshire Forward's Annual Conference in 2007⁶

1 See www.communities.gov.uk and search for latest citizenship survey
 2 Local Councils National Average data unavailable. In future councils must report these national indicators: 3: Civic participation in the local area; 4: % of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality; 5: Overall/general satisfaction with local area; 6: Participation in regular volunteering; 7: Environment for a thriving third sector.
 3 www.campaigns.lga.gov.uk/localdemocracy/home
 4 www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000022.htm
 5 www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongprosperous
 6 www.hertslink.org/portal/Hertfordshire%20Forward_2