

Local Area Agreement

Middlesbrough Partnership Stronger Communities Cross-Cutting Theme

(Incorporating the Statement of Community Involvement)

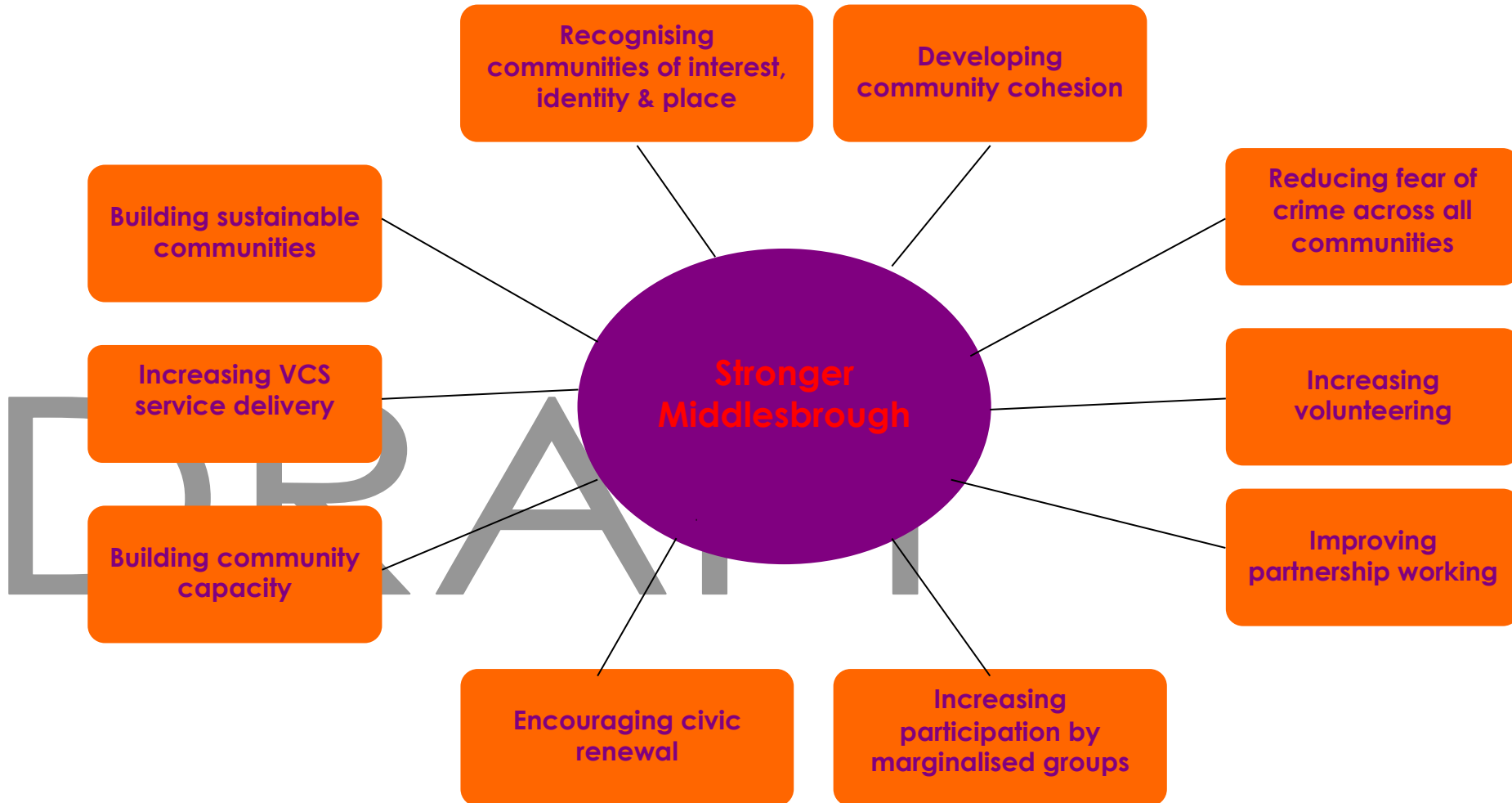
Background

A Stronger Communities cross-cutting theme is seen as adding value to the Local Area Agreement by providing a springboard for increased cross-sectoral and community-based activity throughout the town. The principles and priorities set out below are aimed at building social capital and increasing community cohesion Across Middlesbrough

The local voluntary and community sector (VCS) is a key player in the development of stronger communities throughout Middlesbrough and as such lends itself to the role of theme lead through Middlesbrough Community Network (MCN), which is the vehicle through for VCS engagement in partnership activity. Middlesbrough Community Network includes Middlesbrough Black and Minority Ethnic Network and Middlesbrough Council of Faiths, and work is currently being undertaken to establish networks of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual communities and disabled people in Middlesbrough.

The main aim of the Middlesbrough LAA is to improve the quality of life for Middlesbrough people. No single indicator, activity or outcome can encompass the scale of this aim, although the indicators below will provide a measure of the improved quality of life in Middlesbrough.

Indicators of a Stronger Middlesbrough



1. Indicators of a Stronger Middlesbrough

Recognising Communities of Interest, Identity and Place

Middlesbrough Partnership recognises the wealth of cultural diversity that forms the fabric of Middlesbrough life. It further recognises the importance of three predominant types of community, as identified in the National Standards of Community Development Work, as follows:

Communities of interest e.g.

- Mental health service user group
- Hiking club

Communities of identity e.g.

- Lesbian support group
- Black and minority ethnic group

Communities of place e.g.

- Neighbourhood Association
- Area Community Council

Middlesbrough Partnership recognises that a stronger Middlesbrough will engage with all of these communities in different ways and at different times.

How is this going to be achieved?

Middlesbrough Partnership will commit to engaging with all three types of community to ensure that policy, planning and service delivery are appropriately informed.

It will require:

- being open and honest about the scope and limits of the consultation process
- allowing for meaningful consultation, rather than a token exercise that will “tick the box”

Children and Young People will be engaged through the work and standards identified and agreed by the Communication and Engagement Sub-Group of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership.

Increasing Community Cohesion

A cohesive community is a community in a state of well-being, harmony and stability with widely accepted common goals and values.

In essence, community cohesion is about recognising, supporting and celebrating diversity. It is about creating an environment where there is mutual respect and appreciation of the similarities and differences that make people unique.

Leading, empowering and building cohesive communities is about enabling the community to address relevant issues, deal with problems and realise aspirations in the most effective way. The VCS (notably the faith communities) has a long history of contributing to social integration and cohesion as well as social, sporting, artistic and creative groups that contribute greatly to the feel-good factor in the lives of many people.

Examples: Middlesbrough Council of Faiths, formed in February 2006, has a membership elected from the Bah'ai, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Quaker, Spiritualist, Sikh and Unitarian communities, representing over 80 centres of worship in the town. The Council of Faiths has recently begun an initiative among groups working with Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

Middlesbrough Council has established an Equality Diversity & Cohesion Forum (EDCF) with several key components, including a Joint Agency Working Group (JAWG), which will focus on agency/service provider approaches to diversity and become a sub group of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Board.

Middlesbrough Partnership recognises that a stronger Middlesbrough will value communities of interest, identity and place. It will celebrate diversity and reduce the stigma and discrimination that is born of lack of understanding and fear of others.

How is this going to be achieved?

Middlesbrough Partnership is committed to ensuring that community cohesion is built into the fabric of all organisations within Middlesbrough by developing:

- o a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities.

- an appreciation and positive valuing of the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances.
- similar life opportunities for those from different backgrounds.
- strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods, and between different faith and ethnic groups .
- educational and community-based initiatives that will tackle stigma and discrimination based on ignorance and fear
- youth initiatives aimed at building understanding and interaction between communities
- initiatives that enable organisation and self-help within marginalised communities and encourage their inclusion in mainstream planning and decision-making

Building community cohesion is fundamental to the purpose and ethos of Middlesbrough Community Network. The last few years have seen the development of Middlesbrough BME Network and the recent emergence of Middlesbrough Council of Faiths. Middlesbrough Community Network is now seeking to support the development of a strong community presence among disabled people and lesbian, gay and bisexual communities. Progress on this will be monitored through the Stronger Middlesbrough Advisory Group (see below).

Reducing Fear of Crime across all communities

Crime and, perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this document, the fear of crime, play a significant role in the development of stronger communities. By reducing fear of crime, communities are able to function better, engage with each other more freely and develop social relationships that lend themselves to increased community cohesion.

In 2005, Middlesbrough Council's town-wide survey found that 93% of those questioned stated that their fear of crime had been reduced significantly.

Example: Barnardo's SECOS Project enables young people live a fulfilling, abuse-free life.

Middlesbrough Partnership recognises that a stronger Middlesbrough will build on this achievement to reduce the fear of crime across all communities.

How is this going to be achieved?

Middlesbrough Partnership is committed to reducing the fear of crime across our communities. People's safety is compromised not only on the streets of Middlesbrough but in, for example, the homes of women subject to domestic physical

and sexual abuse. This will be delivered through a multi-agency approach that is well versed in delivery to the most vulnerable people. See the Safer, Stronger Communities block for further details.

Increasing Volunteering

Volunteering provides an opportunity to develop confidence in addition to, knowledge, skills, abilities and social networks. Volunteers. Middlesbrough's newly established Volunteer Centre has supported over four hundred and fifty volunteers and established over one hundred and ten opportunities (2005). Recent research by Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA) on behalf of Middlesbrough Community Network has found that there are an estimated **9,918** volunteers in Middlesbrough working around **4,341,212** hours annually, the equivalent of **2,256** full-time equivalent posts.

Example: RSVP encourages people over 50 to take an active part in their community, and encourages them to put their ideas into practice.

Middlesbrough Partnership recognises the value of increasing the number of volunteers and opportunities for volunteering in building a stronger Middlesbrough.

How is this going to be achieved?

Middlesbrough Partnership is committed to increasing opportunities for volunteering through the following:

- Providing support for volunteering infrastructure
- Recruiting new volunteers including public and private sector employees
- Increasing the number of volunteering opportunities
- Promotion and development of Best Practice in working with volunteers
- Publicising a range of current contributions to community cohesion and regeneration from volunteers

Improving Partnership Working

Middlesbrough Partnership is committed to the continuous improvement of partnership working at all levels. It is through multi-agency and cross-sector responses that the challenges that face Middlesbrough will be overcome. Equal weight will be given to each partner's view and partnership structures (i.e. meetings and collaborative frameworks) will help facilitate this process by fostering best practice.

Example: Middlesbrough Works is a cross-sector partnership which supports employment, training and education initiatives in Middlesbrough

Meeting the needs of local people through responsive public services is an essential requirement for a stronger Middlesbrough and Middlesbrough Partnership recognises the importance of effective partnerships in achieving this aim.

How is this going to be achieved?

Partnership working will be improved by:

- supporting the development of equitable, flexible and mutually accountable partnerships
- developing effective and appropriate consultation methods
- participating in the Improving Local Partnerships project

Encouraging Civic Renewal

In 2005 Middlesbrough Council received 'Civic Pioneer' status from the Home Office. Civic pioneers are committed to developing and sustaining opportunities for local people and groups to be more effectively engaged in improving their communities.

There are three key ingredients to Civil Renewal:

- **Active citizens:** people with the motivation, skills and confidence to speak up for their communities and say what improvements are needed
- **Strengthened communities:** community groups with the capability and resources to bring people together to work out shared solutions
- **Partnership with public bodies:** public bodies willing and able to work as partners with local people

Example: *The Active Learning for Active Citizens Pilot in Middlesbrough*

Middlesbrough Partnership recognises the importance of civic renewal to building a stronger Middlesbrough.

How is this going to be achieved?

This will be achieved, in part, through the development of Middlesbrough's Civic Pioneers status, awarded in 2005.

- Middlesbrough Partnership will re-invigorate the Civic Pioneer programme through the Civic Pioneer steering group, in line with the Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor's Report *Middlesbrough: The New Civic Agenda* (April 2005). The steering group will report progress on a quarterly basis to the Stronger Middlesbrough Advisory Group (see below).

Building Community Capacity

Middlesbrough's voluntary and community sector comprises approximately three hundred voluntary and community organisations (VCOs). VCOs are defined by the following characteristics:

- **independence** in that they determine their own existence, constitution, and objectives;
- **volunteer control** in that their management committee members/board of directors/trustees derive no financial benefit from these positions and all surpluses are re-invested rather than distributed and;
- **creation of public benefit** of a social, environmental and/or economic nature for the community.

Middlesbrough's voluntary and community organisations include charities that employ staff to provide significant local services (e.g. Age Concern, My Sister's Place), organisations that rely to a large extent on local volunteers to deliver services (e.g. CAB, Cruse), through to purely voluntary groups (e.g. Fleet House Residents' Group, Women's Linx). Some of the larger organisations are arms of national charities (e.g. Barnardo's Secos); others, such as Community Ventures and Community Campus have grown from initiatives by Middlesbrough People.

Community capacity-building (or community development) implies the provision of support to

- enable groups to develop their ideas for action to improve their communities
- enable community groups to carry out projects and activities, and to secure the resources necessary to do so
- help groups to improve their management and organisation
- help the most socially excluded groups access training to develop their skills and expertise
- enable groups to build on their successes to develop their activities and/or services.

Community capacity-building benefits the wider community in terms of activities and or services provided, and the individual, in terms of increased skills, knowledge and self-confidence. In short, it builds social capital by enabling people to become

active participants in their communities and wider society. An active voluntary and community sector is indicative of a strong community.

Example: Over the last year, MVDA has supported around 100 different local groups. The Agency has seen a steady increase in the demand for its capacity-building services (established only 2 years ago).

Middlesbrough Partnership recognises the importance of supporting the continued development of a vibrant and well resourced voluntary and community sector in building a stronger Middlesbrough.

How is this going to be achieved?

We aim to develop in Middlesbrough a culture of self-help that recognises and values the potential of local people to bring about social change within their own communities. Middlesbrough Partnership will support and encourage local initiatives to increase voluntary and community action to improve their communities by:

- making resources available for small grants to support voluntary and community action across the range of partnership activity and thus enable new groups to contribute to neighbourhood renewal.
- supporting community development and capacity - building initiatives that work with groups at different levels of maturity to help them move to the next level of development.

Increasing VCS service delivery

The VCS is recognised as being able to develop value-for-money solutions to meet the need of their respective clients. Investing in the delivery of public services through the VCS should ensure that best value and best practice can increase the benefits to Middlesbrough, especially when partnerships and consortia are able to collaborate in innovative and productive ventures.

Example: Middlesbrough Partnership recently endorsed an action plan designed to promote delivery of health and social care services in Middlesbrough by voluntary and community organisations.

Middlesbrough Partnership acknowledges the VCS as a provider of high quality, cost effective local services. It recognises the added value in the form of social capital that comes from supporting the delivery of services by the VCS.

How is this going to be achieved?

- Middlesbrough public service commissioners will ensure that service delivery offers best value for local people and that local organisations (including VCOs) are able to compete effectively and fairly for appropriate service delivery contracts.
- Middlesbrough Partnership recognises that current commissioning and procurement processes need to be further developed to ensure greater transparency and equality of opportunity for appropriate service delivery contracts.
- Middlesbrough Partnership will commit to abiding by the principles set out in the local COMPACT and will actively engage with the VCS when commissioning and procuring services, encouraging the development of new partners (such as social enterprises or multi-agency consortia).

Building sustainable communities

A sustainable community is a place where people want to live and work, now and in the future. It is safe and embracing of its most vulnerable members. Sustainable communities:

- balance and integrate the social, economic and environmental components of their community
- meet the needs of existing and future generations
- respect the needs of other communities in the wider region or internationally also to make their communities sustainable.

Example: The implementation in Middlesbrough of Local Agenda 21 (known locally as Action 2020), which embodies the principles of sustainable development.

Middlesbrough partnership recognises and embraces the principles of sustainable communities

How is this going to be achieved?

This will be achieved by:

- promoting the principles of sustainability as enshrined in Local Agenda 21 (Action 2020 in Middlesbrough) across the work of the Partnership, recognising the complementarity of social, economic, cultural and environmental sustainability.

- o ensuring that all activities undertaken and endorsed by the partnership operate to best practice in terms of environmental sustainability.
- o acknowledging and promoting the benefits that environmental sustainability brings to other aspects of Quality of Life in the town, such as healthy lifestyles.

2. The Benefits to Middlesbrough of fostering stronger communities

The benefits to Middlesbrough are:

- o Raising aspirations across Middlesbrough through encouraging individuals and organisations to achieve their economic, social and spiritual potential
- o The development of individuals' knowledge, skills and experience through increased volunteering
- o The development of local solutions to local problems
- o Increased participation in democratic processes inclusive of all ages and communities
- o Increasing social Inclusion and community cohesion through the reduction of stigma and discrimination
- o The development of a more robust voluntary and community sector, better able to provide a wider range of self help and sustainable services to local people
- o Built-in sustainability into all the elements of the LAA

3. Implementation and monitoring

A Stronger Middlesbrough Advisory Group (SMAG) will be established to sit alongside Middlesbrough Partnership's Action Groups to oversee the implementation of this cross-cutting theme. It will meet a minimum of 4 times a year and will be serviced by MVDA's Planning and Partnership Team (which is core funded through Middlesbrough Partnership). Partners are committed to ensuring high-level officer representation to ensure the efficacy of representation and decision-making.

Membership will be as follows:

- o Co-ordinators or Chairs of Middlesbrough Partnership Action Groups
- o Appropriate senior officers from key partner agencies.
- o Appropriate member representation from Middlesbrough Council
- o Middlesbrough Council's Community Cohesion Officer
- o The Chairs of Middlesbrough Community Network, Middlesbrough BME Network and Middlesbrough Council of Faiths

- Appropriate representation from other marginalised community groups, including, but not limited to:
 - Gay, lesbian and bi-sexual communities
 - Disabled people
- Representation from key groupings of Middlesbrough people, including the Community Council Clusters, significant service user engagement forums, the Children and Young People's Communications and Engagement Sub-group.

4. The Statement of Community Involvement

Community involvement throughout the development and delivery of the LAA is at the heart of our vision of a stronger Middlesbrough.

Core principles

- Middlesbrough Council (as lead body in the Middlesbrough LAA) and Middlesbrough Partnership are committed to building a stronger Middlesbrough through the above measures.
- Middlesbrough Partnership recognises that the involvement of communities of identity, interest and place is essential to the successful delivery of LAA outcomes.
- Middlesbrough Partnership recognises the support and development of a strong and vibrant voluntary and community sector as essential to the successful delivery of LAA outcomes.

The Development and consultation process

As an area engaged in the third round of LAAs, Middlesbrough has had a long lead-in period. However, it is recognised that the engagement process suffered from the fact that both Middlesbrough Partnership and Middlesbrough Community Network were without key officers during a critical period in the initial stages of the process, with the result that consultation times for the draft document were shorter than contributors would have hoped. The LAA lead officers made strenuous efforts to ensure the engagement of the voluntary and community sector, but lessons learned in the early stages of drafting suggest that all partners would have benefited from the prior establishment of a clear timeline and agreed milestones. This has been rectified in the later stages of the process.

- Information sessions held in early 2006 informed all partners of the intended LAA process and the potential implications of the LAA. This included a dedicated session for the VCS through Middlesbrough Community Network.

- Priorities were discussed at Partnership Action Groups, in most of which representatives of Middlesbrough Community Network are involved. (In retrospect, this process would have benefited from universally clear understanding of the task and process).
- A stakeholder event in June 2006 discussed general priorities for the LAA.
- A reference group was established by Middlesbrough Community Network to oversee VCS engagement in the LAA.
- Agreement was reached relatively late in the day (July) that Middlesbrough Community Network would take the lead on production of the Statement of Community Involvement and a Stronger Communities cross-cutting theme and a development process was devised as follows:
- Circulation of basic information and a timetable of activity to all members of MCN;
- Circulation of the Stronger Communities cross-cutting theme, including the Statement of Community Involvement, to members of MCN with a ten-day period for comment;
- Arrangement for consultation on the stronger communities draft with the following groups of Middlesbrough People:
 - Middlesbrough Council's Social Care User Engagement Forums
 - The Community Council Clusters through the Cluster Workers
- Four consultation events for the VCS on the stronger communities theme, including dedicated events for the Council of Faiths and BME Network Consultation, during August/September 2006;
- During July it was also agreed that, in order to ensure the free flow of information, there should be member and officer representation of MCN at all LAA planning meetings, including meetings of Action Group Chairs. It was agreed that the Partnership's LAA leads would attend meetings of the VCS LAA reference group as appropriate.
- The draft LAA was circulated to MCN members (with feedback forms for comment)
- *Details to be included about consultation around further refinement of the LAA from October 2006 to January 2007 – to be agreed with the Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT) through the identified lead CMT member and the identified Lead Officer to provide a fit with Partnership timescales.*
- A commitment has been made to develop the “review and refresh” stages of the LAA to ensure that LAA mechanisms are improved as a result of lessons learned from developing this new work.
- A Stronger Middlesbrough Advisory Group (SMAG) will be formed upon the adoption of the Local Area Agreement (February 2007)

Implementation

- Local Area Agreement outcomes will be lead by the most appropriate provider (including VCS organisations), which will be appropriately resourced to take on this role.

- Middlesbrough public service commissioners will seek to increase the proportion of services delivered by the VCS throughout the lifetime of the LAA.
- Middlesbrough Partnership will ensure that all partners are involved in the design, delivery and review of all public services.
- In order to ensure that public services are appropriate and meet required quality standards, Middlesbrough is committed to a robust evaluation of services over the lifetime of the LAA. VCS organisations and service users will be meaningfully engaged in the monitoring and evaluation of public services.
- It is especially important that public services meet the needs of service users. Mechanisms for improving public services will therefore seek to involve service users appropriately. This will include the use of clear language and user-friendly evaluation materials where possible.
- Over the lifetime of the LAA and particularly during the review and refresh stages, all partners and stakeholders will be encouraged to participate in the further improvement of the LAA and its outcomes through a consultation process.

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