

TAMESIDE'S VOICE

HAVE YOUR SAY ON NEW DEVELOPMENTS



“There is a role for government, but what works best is when we work together with those committed individuals and organisations sharing our ambitions, energy, expertise and resources to achieve real and positive change within communities.”

Hazel Blears,
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government



Tameside 3rd Sector Coalition has been consulting with some of you about Voice – ‘the network of networks’ for community and voluntary groups/organisations. Now, it is time for everyone to have a last say on the proposals we have developed. This briefing will tell you all about Voice - how T3SC supports individuals in groups and organisations to have a voice where plans and decisions are made that affect you, what meetings Voice will facilitate, what they are for and who can come. We also want to ensure that everyone knows what the thematic networks associated with Voice do.

We would greatly appreciate it if you could take a little time to fill in the ‘Final Feedback’ form for us. On the form there is also an invitation to a final feedback lunch – if you would like to join us and tell us your thoughts. We value what people have told us already and have developed a proposal that we hope makes sense to all of you. We can then move on to developing a new and stronger voice for community and voluntary groups/organisations across Tameside.

VOICE | THE NETWORK OF NETWORKS

Prior to the establishment of Tameside Voice there was no co-ordinated approach to representation of community and voluntary groups/organisations in local decision making particularly the vital discussions such taking place through the Tameside Strategic Partnership (TSP). There were some representatives but they had no support group or structure to enable them to speak with confidence on behalf of the whole sector. The establishment of Tameside Voice in 2002 provided this structure and the support for involving local groups and organisations in decisions, plans and services that affect them. In the last year Voice’s transparent and accountable structure for involvement has elected and supported more than 30 representatives of community and voluntary groups/organisations to the Tameside Strategic Partnership.

Voice has grown steadily - from a small voice to a big voice - and became known as ‘the network of networks’. Today, T3SC supports seven Tameside wide thematic networks that feed into local decision making through the Tameside Strategic Partnership:

- Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Forum and associated BME Women’s Forum
- Faiths United – interfaith network
- Health and Social Care Network
- Tameside Community Union (for those working with children, families and young adults)
- Tameside’s Older People’s Action Group (TOPAG)
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Network

Supporting representatives is not the only achievement of the thematic networks. Tameside Voice has been successful at increasing engagement of community and voluntary groups/organisations and the communities of Tameside in civic life and the delivery of services. As well as providing a mechanism for consulting with these communities and groups it has gone beyond this to identifying ways that these communities can contribute to the achievement of the local plans such as the Community Strategy.

In short we have moved from consultation alone towards true engagement.

Across Voice there are examples of members making local life better through their joint activities (supported by a dedicated team at T3SC) including:

- the successful interfaith fun day, held in the summer
- dissemination of information on community safety issues such as bogus callers and rogue traders
- bringing together over 50's groups providers / organisers for recognition of the importance of their work
- a successful consultation event for community and voluntary groups/organisations to comment on Tameside and Glossop NHS 5 year plan for commissioning services
- being part of the development of the Lust for Life magazine for over 50's.
- helping deliver Play Day in Stamford park last August enjoyed by 2000 people
- work with both social services and the police to increase job applications from the Asian community
- BBC interview of an ex drug user who gave up drug abuse after accessing T3SC services
- a regular community development workers lunch that is a priority meeting place for new employees

Voice and the associated thematic networks will be showcasing their work and the independent contribution of the community and voluntary groups/organisations in the future. The proposed changes in the Voice structure are intended to strengthen this impact.

SUPPORTING VOICE | THE T3SC POLICY & PARTICIPATION TEAM

The small, dedicated T3SC Policy & Participation Team:

- Enables the participation of community and voluntary groups/organisations in local decision making especially disadvantaged or 'easy to exclude' groups'
- Supports representatives – building skills and empowering them to speak up and influence decisions
- Advocates on behalf of all the community and voluntary groups/organisations in Tameside - ensuring that community and voluntary groups/organisations contributions' to local targets for improving quality of life are recognised and celebrated
- Is developing a cohesive voice by facilitating a transparent and accountable structure for consultation and representation
- Enhances work with key decision makers by being a key point of contact and ensuring ongoing dialogue around the networks needing support.
- Builds the capacity and sustainability of community and voluntary groups/organisations and signposts groups to support and development providers – within T3SC and externally.
- Provides useful important information, including policy briefings, practical support (booking meetings, venues, minutes etc), participation costs (refreshments, transport etc) and publicity production and circulation
- Initiates community outreach - as not everyone has the time, desire or confidence to engage with formal meetings, including targeted work to ensure engagement of underrepresented groups



FEEDBACK | ON VOICE FROM DECISION MAKERS

In Tameside, the commitment to engaging with community and voluntary groups/organisations through Voice, and the recognition of the contribution that the sector makes to the quality of life locally, has been clearly demonstrated and embedded in the local decision making structure of the Tameside Strategic Partnership (TSP).

Voice is seen by TSP partners as the way to engage and get representation from community and voluntary groups/organisations, and by community and voluntary groups/organisations as the way to influence local decisions. Last summer an inspection of the local authority commented on, "well established and productive partnership arrangements", which Voice has been a continued part of.

FEEDBACK | ON VOICE FROM NETWORK MEMBERS

T3SC's research with network members and representatives has helped develop the proposals for Voice. Results show:

- The various thematic Voice Networks work well as a means of gaining information to feedback to groups/communities, sharing ideas and providing mutual support.
- People strongly want to be more involved in decision making but there are still some structural barriers to overcome.
- All thematic networks want to build on work around community outreach, and one off events, as a means of enhancing the role of representatives and getting more groups/organisations involved.
- Representatives want training that addresses their strategic role but also want existing skills, knowledge and experience acknowledged.

THE FUTURE OF VOICE | FROM A SMALL VOICE, TO A BIG VOICE, TO A NEW VOICE

To further develop the role and contribution of Voice, the following structural changes are proposed:

1 | MEMBERSHIP

Membership of Voice currently comes through the associated thematic networks who each elect two places at Voice. So you currently have to be a member of a network to be part of Voice.

The proposal is that Voice becomes more open:

- Membership of Voice will be open to all community or voluntary groups/organisations
- Attendees should be nominated from their community or voluntary group/organisation who has approved their representing them
- Individuals will be able to attend Voice meetings and find out about relevant thematic networks according to their interests and needs
- Individuals will not be able to act as representatives in their own right.

T3SC is developing processes for best supporting individuals who attend Voice with particular emphasis on directing them to District Assemblies as the existing structure for individual consultation.

2 | TSP REPRESENTATIVES

Currently, there are 5 community or voluntary group/organisation representatives at Tameside Strategic Partnership (TSP), two are elected from Voice, there is a shared place elected by the BME network and Faiths United, and there have been two permanent places (for Tameside Racial Equality Council and Better Government for Older People).

The proposal is that Voice has a more transparent and democratic process for representation at TSP:

- Voice should elect all 5 representatives to TSP from its full membership
- T3SC will hold one of these places at TSP to support these representatives.
- Individual thematic networks will continue to elect representatives to the relevant thematic partnerships of the Tameside Strategic Partnership.
- All representatives will serve a two year term upon election, allowing time to learn and implement their role but also enabling new representatives to come forward.
- A representative can seek another two year term before having to allow a new representative to come forward.
- Stand in representatives will be appointed to cover an absence of a representative and they will shadow the representative in a handover period.

3 | SUPPORT FOR REPRESENTATIVES

At present representatives are supported with information and briefings (especially before and after decision making meetings) by the relevant T3SC network officer.

The proposal is that the experience and learning from this support is brought together across the thematic networks through a detailed representative's induction pack including clear code of conduct, role description and expectations for representatives, reporting procedure, and support commitments and responsibilities of T3SC. This will be accompanied by an induction process, continued training sessions and the development of a training plan for representatives tailored to the individual concerned. This process is supported by the recent research in representative support that T3SC have received training in and contributed material to.

4 | MEETINGS

Currently Voice meetings occur four times a year.

The proposal is that:

- There should be a least two Voice events per year
- At Voice meetings there will be more time for discussion between thematic networks, mutual support between groups/organisations, and a forum to gather a broad range of views, issues, concerns and successes to inform and develop actions that Voice, the sector and T3SC will take.
- An enhanced feedback mechanism, drawing from the practices developed in the thematic networks, will also be put in place to show more clearly that we make a difference through our actions together on important issues, and to communicate representatives activities and gather input for continued representation.

5 | THEMATIC NETWORK ACTIVITY

In the past some thematic networks have been viewed as simply mechanisms to “tell agencies what’s wrong and what needs to change”.

The proposal is that each thematic network will be encouraged and supported to develop a clear ‘action plan’ including:

- Each thematic network will have its own membership criteria and terms of reference based on its stage of development and needs
- Adequate feedback and planning time between representatives and the relevant thematic network
- Plans to showcase the independent contribution of community and voluntary groups/organisations to Tameside
- A clear promotion strategy for the thematic networks so that everyone knows what they do and how they can get involved

FACING THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

“The third sector also has a unique ability to articulate the views of citizens and drive change...”

Communities in Control,

Real People, Real Power, page 6, paragraph 30.



To facilitate these changes T3SC has also undertaken a restructure in order to acknowledge the increasing importance, and resource demands, of supporting representatives and advocating on behalf of community and voluntary groups/organisations. A new post of Policy and Participation Team Manager has been created, at a senior level, to manage the team that facilitate Voice and the thematic networks.

National policies also show a number of areas of opportunities for Voice with the continued development of partnership work, like that of the Tameside Strategic Partnership (TSP) to strengthen community engagement in a range of settings. Government guidance for structures like the TSP very clearly reminds them of their duty to involve community and voluntary groups and organisations, and organisations like T3SC who support them, in both the design and the delivery of public services (see *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities*, July 2008).

Together we can recognise the opportunities and challenges ahead and respond to them starting with these proposals. As with any network we need to work together to achieve this. We look forward to your feedback and to seeing you at the upcoming Voice meetings to continue our discussions with one another and plan how we can make more of a difference in Tameside.

WHAT NEXT?

T3SC are extremely grateful for the time you have taken to consider these proposals. We would greatly appreciate you filling in the attached final feedback form and returning it to us by Monday 20 April. If you do have any queries please get in touch with T3SC through the details on the form or come along to the final feedback lunch on Tuesday 31 March. The key dates with details are listed below:

- Final feedback lunch - **Tuesday 31 March**, 11.30am-2pm, at the T3SC offices
- Deadline for final feedback forms to be returned – **Monday 20 April**, to T3SC
- New Voice meeting - **Tuesday 12 May**, 5-7.30pm, at Hyde Town Hall

**Thanks again for your time
and we hope to see you at the
New Voice meeting.**

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T3SC Policy & Participation Team, February 2009



TAMESIDE'S VOICE

NEW DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS - FINAL FEEDBACK FORM



FOR EACH PROPOSAL PLEASE TICK ONE OF THE OPINION BOXES					AS WELL AS TICKING AN OPINION BOX (LEFT) PLEASE ADD BELOW ANY QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSALS THAT YOU HAVE.	
PROPOSALS	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NO OPINION	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS
MEMBERSHIP PROPOSALS...						
Voice membership should be open to all community and voluntary groups and organisations.						
Voice meetings should be open to individuals to attend						
Individuals should not be able to act as representatives in their own right						
TSP REPRESENTATIVES PROPOSALS...						
Voice should elect all 5 of it's representatives to the TSP from its full membership						
A T3SC nominee should take one of these places to support representatives						
All representatives should serve a 2 year term once elected						
Representatives should be able to seek one more 2 year term of election in each representatives role						
Stand in representatives should be able to attend meetings in the event of absence or a handover process						
REPRESENTATIVES SUPPORT PROPOSALS...						
A detailed representatives induction pack should be developed						
All representatives should go through an induction process						
All representatives should undertake continued training and have a training plan						

NEW DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS - FINAL FEEDBACK FORM



PROPOSALS	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NO OPINION	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS
MEETINGS PROPOSALS...						
There should be a minimum of 2 Voice meetings a year						
An enhanced feedback mechanism for Voice should be developed						
Meetings between thematic networks, mutual support and forums for discussion to develop actions should have more time in Voice meetings						
THEMATIC NETWORK ACTIVITY PROPOSALS...						
Each thematic network should develop its own membership criteria and terms of reference						
Each thematic network should develop a clear 'action plan'						
Representatives feeding back and planning with their thematic network is a priority action						
A FEW OTHER IMPORTANT QUESTIONS:						
Tell us more about what Voice and the thematic networks have done for you (we want to share your stories in May at the New Voice meeting)						
In addition to the proposals above are there other ways to improve Voice?						
Could you help contribute to the development of Voice in any way?						

I would like to (please tick below as relevant):

☐ Attend the final feedback group on Tuesday 31 March, 11.30am-2pm, at the T3SC offices

☐ Attend the New Voice meeting on Tuesday 12 May, 5-7.30pm, so I can find out more about the thematic networks and being a representative.

☐ Find out more about the [] network

☐ Find out more about becoming a representative

☐ Receive Voice news by email

Your details (these will be detached from the feedback form above so that it remains anonymous):