



Local Democracy Kirklees Council

Using the Place Standard to have conversations about what matters to citizens in our local places

We know that our unique local places really matter to our citizens. In Kirklees we're working with our citizens, councillors, colleagues and partners to make sure that everyone has a stake in the place where they live, work or visit.

We're using a tool called the Place Standard, which was developed by NHS Health Scotland, the Scottish Government and Architecture & Design Scotland. This is a way of helping to get conversations going about any place (it could be your street, neighbourhood or town), by using some simple questions.

Our towns, villages and communities are the strength of Kirklees – and it is these places which local people feel the strongest sense of belonging to. Our citizens would like us to do much more to recognise our unique local places.

We know this through the work of the Kirklees Democracy Commission, who heard clearly that our citizens want to have more of a conversation about what matters in our places (instead of stop-start consultations), and more of a voice in what happens here.

The learning from the Commission's 2017 report, "Growing a stronger local democracy, from the ground up", helped us to develop a new approach to citizen engagement in Kirklees. Our design principles for citizen engagement, based on this learning, include: Embracing local identity, Treating people as citizens not customers, Co-producing and "doing with, not to", Placing councillors at the heart, and Seeing staff as citizens and agents for change.

The Place Standard tool has given us a practical way of putting these principles into action in our local places. Following a successful pilot, we worked with people in ten different areas of Kirklees during 2019. In the majority of places community groups, volunteers or ward councillors are co-ordinating the activities with support from the Democracy Service. We are working where citizens choose to have the conversations, and each place is defined in the

way that participants choose. Over 200 staff from across Kirklees Council have also received training and are helping to deliver the activities.

One of the valuable things about the Place Standard tool is that it works well at many different scales and in many settings. Our engagement activities have included conversations in two high rise blocks of flats, in neighbourhoods, in towns and villages, and in Huddersfield town centre.

Our citizens have taken part in conversations in a huge number of different settings, including on park benches, at bus stops, at local schools, in shops and businesses, at community events, in sheltered housing schemes, whilst waiting to pick up children from football practice, in their local library, by visiting drop-in events, by requesting a home visit or by taking part online.

The conversations are open, enabling everyone to talk about what matters to them, rather than starting with a list of pre-determined options. Each conversation includes 14 themes, which together give an overall impression of what it feels like to be part of a local place. Importantly, the topics include not only things do with the physical environment (such as streets and spaces) but also the social aspects of a place (including social contact, identity and belonging, and having a sense of influence and control).

Although the Place Standard is used widely across Scotland and is also being used in other countries, putting councillors at the heart of this process is a distinctive aspect of our work in Kirklees. This connection with local councillors helps people to become active citizens who are part of our local democracy.

Over 3,500 people have already participated in the conversations, generating lots of useful insight. We know it's important to keep the conversation going, so we're supporting local people to collate, share and act on what we have learned together. We publish the results on our *How Good Is Our Place?* blog so that everyone who has a stake in a place can benefit from, and help respond to, what we've learned.

We're changing the way we do things as a council, to make sure that we can respond to the insights we're gaining from citizens and can work together to make our local places even better. Our Place Standard conversations are a key part of our emerging approach to Place Based Working in Kirklees. We're looking forward to being able to share what happens next.

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