CULLOMPTON TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Adopted 26th April 2012
Reviewed and revised February 2015
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This document forms the Council's Community Engagement Strategy. It sets out:

- The role of community engagement and its importance.
- How Cullompton Town Council engages the wider community and identifies the needs and aspirations of the community.
- How the Council can improve community engagement.

1.2. The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Encourage effective local community engagement.
- Ensure that embedded throughout the Council there is a clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions which affect them.
- Enable the aspirations/comments/suggestions etc obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way in which services are being delivered.
- Identify how the Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to hard-to-reach groups).

2. THE COUNCIL'S COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

2.1. Cullompton Town Council is committed to providing a democratic representational voice for the people of Cullompton; central to this ethos is engagement with the local community in a proactive and meaningful way.

3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – AN OVERVIEW

3.1. Community engagement is concerned with giving local people a voice and involving them in decisions which affect them and their community. This may include individuals, voluntary and community organisations as well as other public sector bodies.

It provides an opportunity for local people to talk to the Council about their aspirations and/or needs in their community and neighbourhood. It allows the Council to consult with and inform people about what services it provides, how its priorities and policies are determined and how well it is performing.

Without consultation, addressing a particular need is a "hit and miss affair" as there is no way of establishing what is required to address the problem.

There are a wide range of consultation methods such as surveys, neighbourhood meetings, questionnaires, public enquiries and "planning for real" exercises.

3.2. The term "stakeholder" makes reference to a wide range of people and groups (these might include residents, visitors, businesses, government, voluntary organisations, public service organisations etc) all of which have an interest in the Council's services and projects.

"Hard-to-reach groups" refers to those who experience social exclusion and are sometimes perceived as being disempowered. Some examples include young people, elderly people, or those with physical disability, language, financial constraints, cultural differences or social expectations. Sometimes organisations do not put enough effort into seeking their views, but it is important to note that sometimes they have excluded themselves through personal choice; it is recognised that approximately 80% of residents (anywhere) choose to close their doors and not become involved in the "outside world" thereafter.

3.3. The key aspects of community engagement include:

- Development of a network of relationships between Council, individuals, voluntary and community groups.
- Clear and open communication to ensure that information is made accessible to all groups.
- Listening to, and achieving an understanding of, a range of people to identify aspirations, needs and problems of local people and groups.

3.4. Effective and meaningful community engagement can provide a number of benefits:
- The problems and needs of local people are clearly identified in order that appropriate new or improved facilities/services can be provided.
- Those participating feel empowered by being involved in decision making in their community and experience a sense of ownership and pride in the new facilities/initiatives.
- It may result in a renewed respect for the Council, enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections or standing for Council.

4. CULLOMPTON TOWN COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

4.1. The Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following ways:

- Allocation of a "Public Question Time" session at the beginning of all Council meetings (including Committees); this provides an opportunity for local residents to

make representations to the Council or ask questions relating to items on the agenda. If requested a written response will be provided.

- Publishing contact details of all Council members and officers on the Town Council website and notice board.
- Production of regular newsletters highlighting the latest developments within the Council and the wider community. Ensuring that the dates of all Council and Committee meetings are available on the website, plus the Minutes of Full Council meetings.
- Uploading the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts onto the Town Council website.
- Consultation exercises with local residents to make provision for their needs such as the research that can provide the basis for a Neighbourhood Plan.
- Involvement in partnerships and consultation work with other authorities to provide improved community facilities e.g. extreme sports facility.
- Use of e/mail groups (eg of town businesses, community groups) to help publicise Town Council events and initiatives, and to seek views on current issues.
- Council press releases are featured in local newspapers to keep the public informed of community events, Town Council projects and other matters.
- The Council enjoys an excellent working relationship with local community groups (for example Cullompton Traders' Association and Cullompton Community Association,) providing representation on many and in the process obtaining the views and opinions of a good cross-section of the local community.
- Councillors and officers meet regularly with Mid Devon District Council Planning Officers and other agencies.
- Councillors and officers meet regularly with Devon & Cornwall Constabulary to discuss crime and anti-social behaviour issues in the local area. A monthly police report is received at meetings of the full Council.
- The Council has an office and an information centre conveniently situated within the town centre, the Town Council provides access for the public Monday-Friday 9.30am to 1.30pm.
- In addition the Town Hall is used by a variety of different organisations and groups, which enables easy access to potential "focus groups" if required for consultation exercises.
- Links with local schools and attendance at school events, including talking to school children about the work of the Council and obtain feedback.
- Links with John Tallack Youth & Community Centre and occasional attendance at youth sessions to discuss local issues and obtain feedback.

Unlike other tiers of local government, Town Councillors always live or work within or close to the town they serve, and therefore have close ties to their constituents and local voluntary and community organisations on a day-to-day basis; this makes them uniquely placed in terms of informed representation.

5. COMMUNICATION

5.1. Cullompton Town Council is committed to improving community engagement by:

- Continuing all the above activities and services into the future and improving relationships with community groups including developing measures to harness the

views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.

- Ensuring that any information published is clear, concise and widely available.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups, as and when the need arises.
- Participating in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas.
- Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other community groups, in order to encourage new relationships/partnerships to be formed and raise community spirit.
- Ensuring that appropriate evaluation is carried out following consultation exercises to ensure that lessons learned are carried forward and an assessment made of how effective/useful the consultation was.

6. LINKING WITH OTHER COUNCIL POLICIES

How will this link to other policies?

6.1. This strategy is cross-cutting affecting many, if not all, of the Council's policies and strategies, including:

- Equality and Diversity – integral to good governance, leadership and appreciation of the diversity in our community.
- A Community Engagement Strategy is a requirement for the future Re-accreditation of Quality Council Status and for legitimate exercise of the General Power of Competence.

7. REVIEW

7.1. This strategy will be reviewed annually in October by the Policy & Resources Committee and amended as necessary based on good practice or evidence taken forward.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1. The adoption of this Community Engagement Strategy will assist in improving communication between the Council and the wider community. This will enable the Council to better understand the needs and aspirations of local residents/groups, and in turn, facilitate appropriate projects to meet those needs and create an enhanced community spirit.