



BODMIN TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

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 Bodmin 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 Bodmin Town Council is committed in its Vision and Key Corporate Objectives to provide a democratic representational voice for the people of Bodmin, 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.

- 3.2 Consultation forms an integral part of community engagement and can be defined as: *"The act of consulting or a conference for discussion or the seeking of advice"*. (Collins, 1995)

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.

- 3.3 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.

- 3.4 The key aspects of community engagement include:
- Development of a network of relationships between the Council, individuals, voluntary and community groups.
 - Clear and open communication to ensure that information is made accessible to all groups.
 - Listening and understanding to a range of people to identify aspirations, needs and problems of local people and groups.
- 3.5 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 local community and 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 for standing for Council.

4 **Bodmin Town Council and Community Engagement**

- 4.1 The Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following ways:
- Allocation of a 'Public Representation' session at the beginning of each Full Council meeting. This provides an opportunity for local residents to make representations to the Council or ask questions relating to items on the agenda.
 - Allocation of a 'Public Representation' session at the beginning of each Committee meeting. This provides an opportunity for local residents to make representations or ask questions relating to items on the agenda.
 - Publishing contact details of all Council members and officers on the website.
 - Production of regular newsletters highlighting local events and latest developments within the Council and the wider community (available on the website)
 - Ensuring that agendas and minutes of Committee meetings are available on the website or copies available on request.
 - Uploading the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts onto the website.
 - Involvement in partnerships with other authorities to provide improved community amenity areas i.e. Beacon Nature Reserve.
 - Consultation exercises with local residents (and their children) regarding the provision of play equipment. With specific reference to the Hillside play area - residents were invited to attend a public meeting and a workshop to express their aspirations for play equipment and assist in decision making.

- User surveys have been used to seek public opinion of Council facilities and services through questionnaire based research.
- Inviting members of the public to request 'surgeries' with Councillors in order that they can be represented at a local level.
- Council press releases are featured in local newspapers to keep the general public informed of community events, Town Council projects and other items as necessary.
- The Council enjoys an excellent working relationship with the local college. Councillors are involved in providing citizenship lessons and in the process they obtain the views and opinions of both the youth and organisations involved with young people.
- Some Members and officers are involved in the Bodmin Community Partnership Panel (BCPP) and Police and Communities Together (PACT) which are concerned with addressing crime and anti-social issues in the local area.
- Frequent umbrella meetings with liaison between residents, North Cornwall District Council, County Councillor, Town Council Members and the police.
- The Council has an office conveniently located in the town centre and open from 08.45 until 17.00 on Monday to Thursday and 08.45 until 16.30 on Friday.
- In addition, the Council has a number of rooms which are used by an array of different organisations and groups – which enables easy access to possible 'focus groups' if required for consultation exercises.

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

5 **Communication**

5.1 Bodmin 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. (This includes making information available in appropriate formats for people with visual impairments, learning disabilities, poor literacy or people who require language translation.)
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups, as and when the need arises.
- Developing a web-based blog resource to engage consultation with the local community and wider interested community.
- 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 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 is integral to good governance, leadership and appreciation of the diversity in our community.
 - A Community Engagement Strategy is a requirement for the Re-accreditation of Quality Council Status.

7 **Review**

- 7.1 This strategy will be reviewed regularly (not less than bi-annually) and amended as necessary based on good practice or evidence taken forward.

8 **Conclusion**

- 8.1 The adoption of a 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.

9 **Alternative Formats**

- 9.1 Disability Discrimination Act 1995 – copies of this document in large print (A3 Format) or larger font size, or recorded onto tape as a 'talking book' can be made available for those with sight impairment on request from the Council Office or by telephoning 01208 74159 or e-mailing paul.ocallaghan@bodmin.gov.uk
- 9.2 The Council can also arrange to provide versions in other languages.

10 **Freedom of Information**

- 10.1 In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this Document will be posted on the Council's Website www.bodmin.gov.uk and copies of this document will be available for inspection on deposit in the Council Office.