BOGNOR REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STATEGY

Adopted by the Council at its Meeting held on 5th September 2016

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Introduction

Bognor Regis Town Council takes its responsibility for engaging with local people seriously and aims to take their views and opinions into consideration when making decisions.

The Council wants to ensure that the community is well informed about local issues; has the opportunity to be involved in the decision making process; and is able to give the Council its views on its policies, procedures, service delivery and work with other local organisations. The Council's aim is to build a strong, involved and integrated community.

The purpose of this Community Engagement Strategy is to build on existing good practices and to set out a clear pathway to improve community engagement. This should reflect the diversity of the local population and should be inclusive of all groups within the town area including young people, the elderly and infirm and ethnic groups. The Strategy also acknowledges the Council's desire to work with statutory, voluntary and community partners.

The Strategy will define the following:

1. What is community engagement and why it is important?
2. Engagement with local stakeholders
3. Improved engagement

The Strategy links directly to the Town Council's Corporate Strategy - Priority 2 'Partnership Working and Community Engagement and Empowerment'.

1. What is Community Engagement?

The term 'community' can mean different things to different people. In order to fully meet expectations, the Town Council will take a varied and flexible approach to engaging with local people. To some, community may mean a community of place (within a geographical area); it may mean a community of shared experiences or characteristics (young people, faith groups, ethnic groups, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender); or it could be a community with a shared interest (bowling, music). It is important that all of these groups have the opportunity to be involved in the engagement process and so the Town Council will seek to widen the opportunities it offers for two-way communication to take place.

Community engagement is about making sure that local people are well informed about local issues and services and that they have the opportunity to be involved in decisions about things that have an impact on them. Benefits of the Strategy include:

- Timely involvement of local people and community groups with proposals affecting the town
- Better informed Town Councillors, more closely tuned to the community that they serve
- Improved lines of communication
- Better understanding of each other and respect for each other's views
- A means to help manage expectations towards what is achievable and fundable
- Harness local expertise
- Allow the local community to be heard and to feel that it has been listened to and that their efforts add value to the work of the local authorities
- Developing trust through the system

Engaging with local people helps the Council build a clearer understanding of local issues from the perspective of those who are most affected. Getting to know local people better means that the Council can ensure the most appropriate methods are used to engage with them effectively and successfully. It also allows local people to gain a better understanding of the challenges being faced by the Council in seeking to meet their needs.

2. Engagement with local stakeholders

The Town Council already engages with a number of authorities and organisations which have an interest in the Council's services and projects. These include: county and district council; other parish councils; the Police and emergency services; Town Centre Manager; local business groups; and voluntary and community groups, particularly through the Grant Aid process.

However, there are many other groups representing community interests that the Council does not engage with directly. These include: community interest groups, residents associations, ethnic groups, faith groups, and organisations providing leisure and/or support facilities (e.g. Laburnum Centre). Organisations such as the local Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester (was Council for Voluntary Services) have direct contact with a large number of voluntary groups and charities on a regular basis. It is important that the Council endeavours to include such groups in its engagement process.

Improved Engagement

How can the Town Council improve community engagement?

The Town Council has identified certain activities it undertakes, how the service is delivered and how it can be improved:

Activity	What we do now	What we could do
Council Presence	- Council Office - Mayoral Activities - Civic Ceremonies	- Raise profile of all Councillors - Run Councillor surgeries - Ensure press coverage of

		Mayoral and Civic activities
Council meetings	• Public attendance • Public questions • Presentations by outside bodies • Agendas, reports and Minutes available on Town Council website	• Encourage people to attend Council meetings • Expand the offer of presentations to wider groups from within the community
Council documents	• Strategic, policy, code of conduct, financial documents available on website	
Use of Media	• Notice Boards – updated with agendas before meetings • Website – agendas, minutes and report available • Newsletter - annual • Town Guide • Facebook/Twitter • Local papers	• Develop Facebook/Twitter for general TC activities, not just events • Press already attend Council meeting • Place article in local paper week before meetings, giving details of items for discussion and inviting public to attend
Engaging individuals	• Ad-hoc Councillor phone calls / conversations / meetings	• Councillors talking with individual electors • Establish Councillor surgeries • Establish framework within which reactive work can be dealt with
Engaging Groups	• Councillor representatives on external groups	• Establish database of stakeholders in the Town • Ensure Councillors report back to Council on meetings attended • Obtain clarity on user groups and their status • Act as conduit to encourage groups to engage with each other • Encourage groups to present updates at Council meetings • Seek to develop an understanding of strategic priorities for local groups and bring groups together to collaborate. Consider

		these against Town Council Corporate Strategy
Residents/Community Associations	• Encourage Councillors to attend resident and other community association meetings in their wards	• Develop a framework to ensure that Councillors report content of meetings to Council
Engaging with hard to reach groups	• Give details of Council activities via Newsletter	• Identify groups currently not engaging with the Council – e.g. ethnic groups, young people, elderly people. Develop new ways to engage with and include the views of these groups
Use of local knowledge/expertise	• This process was used in developing Neighbourhood Plan	• Working Groups/Topic Teams to be set up to deal with specific issues – e.g. Youth. Identify organisations / individuals with specific expertise to be involved
Public meetings	• Council and Committee meetings • Annual meeting • Annual Town meeting of Electors	• Consider setting up informal town meetings, as a way to encourage groups and individuals to engage with the Council

The Town Council is committed to improving community engagement by:

- Improving relationships with community groups including the development of measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities
- 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
- Ensuring that the public is appropriately informed about the difficulties as well as the successes with projects so that they can better understand the constraints that the Council operates within
- Carrying out appropriate evaluation following consultation exercises to ensure that lessons learned are carried forward and an assessment of how effective / useful the consultation proved to be

Ward Councillors will play a vital role in many of the above, as they work within their Wards directly with individuals and groups.

Review and Assessment

The strategy will be reviewed and updated annually; its effectiveness will be assessed by Councillors and Council staff and amendments and / or improvements would be recommended if benefits are identified.