

	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY
	BROADSTAIRS & ST. PETER'S TOWN COUNCIL Adopted by Council 27 January 2025 Next review due January 2027

1 Introduction

1.1 This document forms Broadstairs and St Peter's Town Council's Community Engagement policy.

It sets out:

- the role of community engagement and its importance
- how Broadstairs and St Peter's Town Council engages the wider community and identifies the needs and aspirations of the community
- how the Town Council can improve community engagement.

1.2 The objectives of the policy are to;

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

2 Community Engagement: an overview

2.1 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 and other public sector bodies.

It provides an opportunity for local people to talk to the council about their aspirations and needs in their community. It allows the council to consult with and inform people about what services it provides, how it prioritises, how policies are determined and how well it's performing.

2.2 The term "stakeholder" refers to a wide range of people and groups. These might include residents, visitors, businesses, local government, voluntary organisations and public service organisations, all of which have an interest in the council services and projects.

"Hard to reach" groups refer to those who experience social exclusion and are sometimes perceived as being disempowered. Some examples include young people, elderly

people, those with a physical disability, a language barrier, financial constraints, cultural differences or social expectations. The Town Council will put effort into seeking their views, but it also recognises that sometimes they have excluded themselves through personal choice.

2.3 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 and understanding from a range of people to identify aspirations, needs and problems of local people and groups

2.4 Effective and meaningful community engagement can provide several benefits:

- The problems and needs of local people are clearly identified in order that appropriate new or improved facilities and services can be provided.
- Those participating feel empowered by being involved in decision making in their local community.
- This may result in enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections and standing for council.

3 **Broadstairs and St Peter's Town Council and Community Engagement**

3.1 The Town Council will facilitate community engagement in the following ways:

- Make available information on what decisions are being considered and how residents can influence or contribute to the discussions in good time. Methods used to ensure engagement will be through the town council's website, notice boards, social media and the annual report.
- All meetings of the Town Council and its committees are open to the public and press and there is a period set aside for residents to speak in line with the council standing orders

Residents can access agendas for meetings by the town council website and notice boards. Public agendas are also made available at the meetings of the council and its committees.

The Town Council website explains the procedure for residents wishing to speak at meetings. Facilities also exist where residents can, where appropriate or necessary, make written or verbal reports or present petitions to councillors.

- Planning applications are considered at town council meetings held monthly. The opportunities for people to speak applies equally to those agenda items. Equal

opportunities given to applicants, supporters, objectors and local community groups.

- Town Council staff are required to play a neutral role so that residents can be fully involved and be confident that they are receiving unbiased information and support. This neutral involvement will allow more flexibility in the service and the personal element of the contact will hopefully encourage more involvement from the hard-to-reach members of the community
- Details of how to contact the Town Council's office will be displayed on notice boards, council websites, and social media platforms. Details of how to contact councillors will be displayed on notice boards and on the town council website.
- A list of annual council and committee dates including the start times of the meetings and agenda distribution dates can be found on the council website
- The Town Council will be open and accountable in its dealings with new residents and the community. It will make information on its policies and procedures freely available. The town council will be receptive to requests from residents or communities and will attempt to be flexible in order to ensure their opinions are known, not only to the Town Council but to other organisations. This may be by including an item for discussion on an agenda or allowing the local group to put their opinions into an official report undertaken by the Town Council.
- The Town Council will operate a "gateway" service from its office to ensure local people and communities are referred to the correct organisation officer or Town Councillor where the Town Council cannot resolve their issue directly, and make sure public are aware of the ways they can use relevant systems to make their views known.
- Town Councillors will continue to represent the council on various outside bodies to ensure that they are kept informed of the community's needs

4 Communication

4.1 Broadstairs and St Peter's Town Council is committed to improving its community engagement by:

- Continuing all of 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.
- Being proactive and willing to consider any reasonable opportunities that support its purpose of making information available and increasing contributions from the community, especially those difficult to reach.
- Consider holding of a public meeting when dealing with the controversial issues that affect the community.
- Consider holding consultations and surveys when necessary and appropriate, and make results available

- Continuing to work in partnership to review community led policies such as the neighbourhood plan, it will also ensure that priorities from such policies including aspirations are built into its own action plan
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups when the need arises
- Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between council and other community groups in order to encourage new relationships and partnerships to be formed and to raise community spirit.
- Promoting elections and the importance of the democratic process and the value of being a councillor.
- Promoting the value to the town of volunteering.
- The Town Council will review its community engagement strategy on an annual basis to ensure that it remains relevant.

5 Freedom of Information

5.1 in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 this document will be posted on the council website and copies will be available from the Town Council office.

6 Outcomes

The outcomes which we are striving for and against the success of this policy will be measured as:

- improved communication through the establishment of new channels of engagement
- more residents understanding the role of councillors and getting the best effect
- improved engagement with local communities with more people feeling they are involved in decision making and a higher percentage of people involved in volunteering
- improve satisfaction with services provided by the council