

# Kidsgrove Town Council

## Community Engagement Policy

### Introduction

Kidsgrove Town Council recognise the importance of local people, community groups and businesses having a voice in contributing to the debate and decisions on issues being determined by the Town Council and on wider issues within the Parish

This document forms the Town Council's Community Engagement Policy. It sets out:-

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

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/comments/suggestions obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way decisions are being made and services are being delivered;
- Identify how the Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to the harder to reach groups in our society).

### Community Engagement – an Overview

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 opportunity for local people to talk to the Town 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 it prioritises, how policies are determined and how well its performing.

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

Hard to Reach groups refers to those likely to experience social exclusion and are sometimes perceived as being disempowered. Some examples include young people, elderly people, physical disability, language barriers, financial constraints, cultural differences or social expectations. The Town Council will put effort into seeking their views, but it also recognises that sometimes they may have excluded themselves through personal choice.

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.

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.
- This may result in enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections or standing for Council and in volunteering within the community.

## **Kidsgrove Town Council and Community Engagement**

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

- Ensuring information on what decisions are being considered and how residents can influence or contribute to the discussions are available in good time.
- Methods used to ensure engagement will be – through the Town Council website, noticeboards, the Town Council’s social media, posters, consultations, reports and word of mouth.
- All meetings of the Town Council and its committees are open to the public and press and there is a period set aside for public participation.
- Residents can access agendas for meetings via the Town Council website, noticeboard or they can be collected from the Town Council office, public agendas are also made available at the meetings of the Council and its committees.
- The Town Council website, noticeboard, agendas explain the procedure for residents wishing to speak at meetings. Facilities also exist where residents can, where appropriate or necessary, make written reports, present petitions or have a case presented on their behalf to Councillors.
- The Town Clerk is the principal advisor to the Council and other staff also advise on their areas of expertise. They must however be politically neutral and ensure that residents can be fully involved, have their views considered and be confident that they are receiving unbiased information and support from Council Officers.
- Details of how to contact the Town Clerk will be displayed the Council noticeboard, Council website and social media. Details of how to contact Councillors will be displayed on the noticeboard and the Town Council website.
- The Town Council will produce a list of annual Council and committee dates to include the start times of the meetings.
- The Town Council will be open and accountable in its dealing with 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 also to other organisations. This may be by including an item for discussion on an agenda or allowing a local group to put their opinions into an official report undertaken by the Town Council.
- The Town Council will, operate a “gateway” service from both its offices to ensure local people and communities are referred to the correct organisation, Officer, Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council or Staffordshire County Council where the Town Council cannot resolve their issue directly.
- Town Councillors will continue to represent the Council on various outside bodies, to ensure that they are kept informed of the communities’ needs.

## **Communication**

Kidsgrove 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 the principles and standards of its main Communications Policy (which is also available on the website, are applied to its community engagement.
- 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 that are difficult to reach.
- When dealing with controversial issues that affect a particular community then consideration will be given to holding a public meeting.
- Consultations and surveys are to be considered when necessary and appropriate and results will be made available.
- Continuing to work in partnership to produce, embed and review any community led policies.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups when the need or opportunity arises.
- 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 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.
- Reviewing its Community Engagement Strategy on regular basis to ensure that it remains relevant.

## **Freedom of Information**

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.

## **Outcomes**

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

- Improved communication through the establishment of new channels of engagement.
- More residents understanding the role of Councillors, feeling they can become involved and thereby getting the best effect.
- Improved engagement with local communities, with more people feeling that they are involved in decision-making and a higher percentage of people involved in volunteering.
- Improved satisfaction with services provided by the Council.