

North Norfolk District Council Community Engagement Strategy 2022- 2024

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Introduction

Background

The Council's Corporate Plan sets out the Council's priorities. Customer Focus is one of the Council's six priorities. The Council recognises that key to putting residents and customers at the heart of all it does and to improve access to services is through stronger community engagement.

The Council wants to ensure that people feel well informed about local issues, have opportunities to get involved, influence local decision making, shape their area and allow us to continue to improve services they receive.

Community engagement is a powerful tool that can provide invaluable information and help to build confidence within communities but only conducted in a meaningful manner; engagement must always have a purpose and we must be able to demonstrate the impact the responses have had on our decision making.

The Purpose of the Community Engagement Strategy

This Community Engagement Strategy sets out what we mean by engagement, why we are committed to engaging and provides a consistent, corporate and agreed approach to how we engage and use the outcomes to inform our policies, strategies, procedures, service delivery and work with partner organisations.

This strategy seeks to build on the good practices that already exist within the Council; we have provided examples of how we have started to go about this – look out for the boxes throughout the strategy.

Community Engagement helps the Council to understand different views within our communities. Ensuring that the needs of groups or areas that are harder to reach or do not traditionally engage with us are not overlooked is really important; identifying and understanding the barriers that might be stopping certain voices being heard and ultimately increase the number and diversity of people who engage with the Council.

We also need to use the most appropriate engagement technique/s so we get meaningful and appropriate responses. This will help the Council to make better decisions and meet the needs of our communities and is essential for the effective delivery of our corporate priorities.

Services will be expected to consider and apply this strategy when undertaking service-specific consultation and engagement exercises and apply the principles when they work with residents, communities and customers.

Links to Other Strategies and Policies

The Community Engagement Strategy has or will link to the majority of other Council strategies and policies; it will provide a consistent, corporate and agreed approach to how we engage and use the outcomes to inform our policy and strategy development and reviews.

Context of the Community Engagement Strategy

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 introduced a duty on local authorities to involve, inform and consult representatives of local persons where it is appropriate and lawful to do so. The duty came into effect from April 2009.

The “Localism” agenda (The Localism Act 2011) set out in national government policy placed new and greater emphasis on the importance of effective community engagement and the role of local people in decision-making and neighbourhood planning.

The strategy does not replace any statutory or formal consultation processes that we currently undertake, for example in relation to planning, licensing or any appeals processes.

The council is also committed to working with partners where it benefits local communities because ‘joined up’ engagement can help both the public and the council to address local problems that cut across agencies.

Developing the Community Engagement Strategy

We have developed the Community Engagement Strategy from:

1. The Council's Corporate Plan Objectives, which provide a 'framework' of priority areas.
2. Analysis of Community Engagement Strategies from around the UK to identify examples of best practice.
3. Consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

The Council already undertakes a wide range of engagement activity. This 'business as usual' activity and existing projects do not form part of the strategy. However we provide examples relevant to each level of engagement of this activity in this report to:

- Reassure stakeholders that Community Engagement is widely used within the Council
- Provide opportunity for those good examples to be sources of good practice for other Services who are undertaking new engagement activities.

The Corporate Plan

Community Engagement is clearly identified, as a priority for the Council, under the Customer Service theme within the Corporate Plan, however, other community engagement activities are identified under most of the Corporate Plan priorities.

The Corporate Plan provides the framework for the Community Engagement Strategy. The actions identified within the Delivery Plan, which relate to community engagement, are identified within the Community Engagement Action Plan.

Consultation with Stakeholders

Key elements of the Community Engagement Strategy is divided into four themes and these formed the basis of engagement with stakeholders:

- What we define as Community
- The five element model that we have chosen
- The approach to each of those five elements
- How we will ensure transparency on our engagement activities.

In March 2022 we shared these themes at a Town and Parish Forum followed by further engagement on the proposed strategy.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee pre- scrutiny

Consultation with Key stakeholders

The Benefits of Community Engagement

Local and national evidence demonstrate there are benefits to both the Council and the community when engagement activities are delivered well.

Community engagement helps the Council to:

- better understand and respond to the needs of our communities;
- hear the voices of as many communities as possible
- be more accountable to our communities;
- plan and deliver better services;
- make more efficient use of public resources;
- take transparent decisions based on strong evidence;
- build strong and positive relationships within and between local communities;
- test out ideas and explore emerging issues;
- measure the performance of the Council in delivering services;

The local community will:

- have a greater say and choice in the design and delivery of local services
- develop new skills and expertise
- become better informed about the Council's work

Engagement should occur in a systematic way that is integral to everyday working practices.

Improved engagement with our communities and with individuals has been shown to increase involvement with the local democratic process and is likely to result in a higher level of turnout in local elections.

What do we mean by Community?

Communities can mean different things to different people and there are many different groups that make up a living 'community'. Communities may define themselves and definitions do change, people can belong to more than one community and communities themselves are often very diverse. Understanding how the community is defined is key to planning and delivering effective engagement.

Community of place or neighbourhood: A community linked to a particular geographical location such as a ward, village, market town or a location within a town. This location will

The North Walsham Heritage Action Zone development has been supported by a local Board, which has included a wide range of stakeholders.

usually have physical boundaries although they are not always obvious to people who do not live there. These communities may have similar concerns about issues that affect their local area.

Community of interest: A group of people with a shared interest or experience. A community of interest includes service users (for example, car park users) as well as people interested in a particular issue (for example climate change). Each of these communities of interest may require a different way to engage or be engaged.

We run an Environment Forum to understand the views of those who with a particular interest in Climate Change issues and net carbon zero.

Community of identity: A community that is defined by how people identify themselves or how they are identified by society, usually by demographic characteristics (for example,

We are setting up a Youth Council so that the views of young people are fully heard when planning our services.

young people, older people, disabled people, faith groups, black and minority ethnic people, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people).

Generally, people do not associate themselves to just one community, but to several different communities at any one time. This can relate to where they live, work and their interests. It is important to let people define for themselves which communities they wish to be identified with.

The Council recognises that each community will have different needs and wants that need to be balanced and prioritised in the delivery of services and initiatives.

How we will undertake Community Engagement

General Principles

When we undertake community engagement we will:

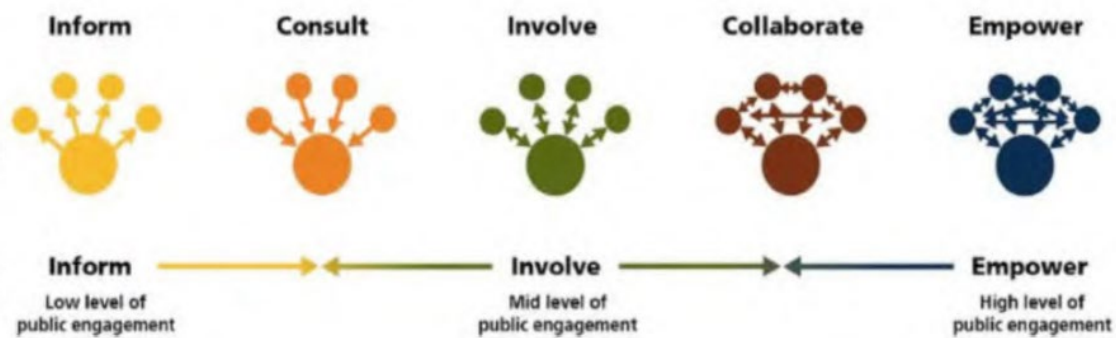
- consider the most appropriate type of engagement for each circumstance, the type and scale of engagement will be appropriate to the potential impacts of the proposal;
- ensure that the consultation captures the full range of stakeholders affected;
- take into account particular needs and work to overcome barriers to participation so that everyone that wants to can participate in the engagement activity;
- where possible we will use the technology to support and enable the engagement process to be as effective as possible;
- be open and transparent about the aims of community engagement activity and what stage of development the policy or proposal has reached;
- coordinate community engagement activities internally and with partners where required, to avoid duplication and consultation fatigue;
- ensure that community engagement activities are realistic and that expectations are not raised unnecessarily or unrealistically;

Levels of Engagement

Community engagement is about giving people the confidence that the services the Council provide are well thought through and balance the needs of local communities. It should provide the skills and power so they can get involved, shape and influence the planning, development and delivery of services.

Delivering engagement activities can take many different forms and the level of involvement can vary greatly. Every type of involvement is important in the community engagement process and different methods will be used depending on the activity and circumstances.

We have chosen to use a model for community engagement that has five elements as shown below.



Community Engagement is spectrum from communication and providing information to empowering communities to do things for themselves. Which level of engagement the Council chooses will be based on a range of factors and needs to be appropriate to the issue or activity, considers the needs of those being engaged and takes account of local circumstances.

We want communities to have confidence in the community engagement process so they can see their contribution is valuable.

Whilst we want to make sure we involve our communities as much as possible we need to make sure that we chose the right level for the particular circumstances or activity.

What does each element of our model mean in practice?

Inform



Where there is no ability to influence the decision then we will say so and make sure we fully inform our communities of this.

Goal	Approach
To provide balanced and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has happened.	We will keep you informed about a decision or direction.

When we engage through the inform route we will:

- provide information in an easily understandable format, using plain language and clarifying the key issues;
- provided in a variety of ways that are easily accessible to everyone in the community;
- highlight where to find further information (e.g. websites, helpline numbers, leaflets) so you can decide what and how much information you wish to acquire;
- be honest where decisions are non-negotiable.

Our website (www.north-norfolk.gov.uk) is our primary source of outward facing information but we supplement this with a range of other information sources such as social media, information signs etc

Consult



Goal	Approach
Two way interactions to obtain feedback on ideas, alternatives or proposals to inform our decision making.	We will explore options and opportunities, and seek to understand your concerns or preferences.

When we consult we will:

- only use consultation processes when there is a real opportunity for people to influence and change decisions and services;
- ensure that the objectives of any consultation are clear e.g. to gather new ideas or test options;
- begin consultation early in policy development when the policy is still under consideration and views can genuinely be taken into account;
- make sure that timeframes for consultation are appropriate to the nature and impact of the proposal;
- be clear about what aspects of the policy or proposal being consulted on are open to change and what decisions have already been taken;

Text to be developed

- make sufficient information available to stakeholders to enable them to make informed comments.

Involve



Goal	Approach
Participatory process to ensure people’s concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	We will involve you in the process so your ideas, concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives or final decisions.

When we involve you we will:

- give genuine influence over decision-making and service delivery;
- say how the results will be used, so that everyone understands how their involvement will influence the final decision.

Text to be developed

Collaborate



Goal	Approach
Working together to develop a shared understanding of all issues and to work out alternatives and a preferred solution for joint decision making.	We will collaborate with you so your advice, innovation and recommendations are included in the final decision that we make together.

When we collaborate we will:

- encourage direct participation in decision-making;
- work with you to co-design or commission services.

Text to be developed

Empower



Goal	Approach
Working together to identify and agree solutions which the community is able to deliver for themselves.	We will empower you to develop solutions for your communities and deliver these for yourselves.

When we empower we will:

- encourage aspects of services to be delivered directly by the users of those services;
- work with you to identify clearly what can be delivered by the community themselves;
- identify the support needed to enable the successful delivery of the solutions.

Flood Warden Teams – there are 17 local flood warden teams serving the communities at risk of flooding along our coastline and around the rivers and broads. These teams are empowered to develop warning and informing plans for their own area.

Ensuring transparency

During community engagement activity we will:

- ensure that information obtained from community engagement activities is honestly interpreted, and enable participants to be part of the analysis process if relevant and they wish to;
- have clear processes to feedback on community engagement activity and outcomes and give reasons if unable to deliver on expectations in a timely and appropriate manner;
- publish consultation responses, including number of responses, and how they have been used within 12 weeks of the end of the consultation. If this is not possible, we will explain why;
- use the information from our engagement activities, alongside other evidence, to inform the design and delivery of effective and efficient services, within our current financial constraints.

Measuring our Engagement

It is important to understand how we are doing when it comes to evaluating the success of this strategy. We will use a variety of methods to measure this including:

- perceptions of residents who feel that the Council involves local residents in its decision making;
- use data to assess whether engagement with the Council has increased ie website
- publishing a summary of feedback received and our response to it
- show evidence of how the results have been used to influence final decisions
- report performance on consultation and engagement activities regularly to members

Appendix 1 - Action Plan

See attached

