

WHISTON TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

Whiston Town Council is the closest tier of local government to the community. The Town Council wishes to work closely with all stakeholders and partners, including all community groups, public bodies and businesses to encourage participation in decision making. The aim is to both deliver better services and create a more active and informed community. We strongly believe that this will improve the quality of life for all residents and help shape the future of the Town. It is essential that Town Council policies reflect local priorities, requirements and aspirations.

This Community Engagement Strategy recognises the diversity of the town, the importance of capacity building and the need to provide appropriate opportunities for residents to participate at whatever level they wish to influence service delivery, decision making and policy development.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement means different things to different people. However, the various means of community engagement are:

- **information:** supports all kinds of community engagement and keeps residents informed about things such as decisions, services, local events etc.
- **consultation:** can be used when there is a decision to make or when there are a number of available choices (e.g questionnaires, Annual Report feedback Visioning Events).
- **attending meetings:** this applies when residents are encouraged to attend meetings of the Town Council. Here the facility exists for the forwarding of views (e.g. Public Open Forum on the agenda). In addition, to the Annual Town Meeting Whiston Town Council hold an additional three Public meetings throughout the year and these are attended by a large number of residents.
- **comment:** residents are encouraged to forward their views, ideas, thoughts etc. by a variety of methods (e.g. telephone, email, letter, surgeries etc.).

TARGET AUDIENCE

Whiston Town Council alone cannot achieve the ambitions in this Strategy. Everybody has a part to play in making the Community Engagement Strategy work, especially:

- **Residents**.all
- **Elected Members**, who play a key role in delivering the aims in this Strategy.
- **TownCouncil Staff**, who play a key role in the delivery of services.

- **Community and Voluntary Sector Organisations**, who provide local services, work directly with local groups and organisations and with individuals in hard to reach groups.
- **Partners**, who seek to deliver a set of complimentary services across the Township.

AIMS

The aim of the Community Engagement Strategy is to improve the way in which the Town Council engages and consults key stakeholders and partners and as a result, support strong, active and inclusive communities. In short, the Town Council is seeking to support:

- **strong communities**: who can form and sustain their own organisations, bringing people together to deal with common concerns.
- **active communities**: where people are supported to improve the quality of life in their own communities.
- **inclusive communities**: where all sections of the community feel that they have opportunities to be involved in decision making and influence public services.

The Town Council aims to promote genuine partnership and collaboration, and ensure that residents have the opportunities and capacity to be effective citizens.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives below specify how the Strategy can deliver an effective and coordinated approach to community engagement for the benefit of all residents and the diverse community of Whiston and The Town Council will:

- develop a variety of methods to make **information available**.
- actively **engage** with all sections of the community.
- ensure that decisions meet the needs of the community by **involving members of the community** in the decision making processes.
- work in **partnership with other organisations** to improve the quality and delivery of local services.
- enhance the **well-being** of the Town
- **learn** from its own and others' experience in the quest of putting the citizen at the heart of the decision making process.

ACHIEVEMENT OF THE STRATEGY

Enhanced community engagement will be achieved by Whiston Town Council through improved communication, consultation, support and joint working.

1. Communication

Communication with residents will be achieved in many ways to ensure that all sections of the community are reached:

- **website:** this has a wealth of information and is regularly updated. Special events and important notices are added on a weekly basis. All Council minutes and agendas are included in addition to a comprehensive financial background of the Town Council. Whiston Town Council Policies are also updated for residents to view.
- **information leaflets:** are available from the Whiston Town Council Office. New leaflets are made available as appropriate.
- **newsletter:** is produced four times per annum and is widely distributed to all user groups, libraries, schools, churches and displayed on local notice boards.
- **Annual Report:** is produced annually and distributed to every household within the Township.
- **Council/Committee Meetings:** these are open to the public and all Council Meetings include a public session when residents can make representations to elected members.

2. **Consultation**

- **consulting all residents** on important issues will be key to the success of the Strategy. It will ensure that those most affected are given a voice and an opportunity to influence the decision making process.
- consulting all residents involves the **identification of hard to reach groups** (e.g. the elderly, disabled, youth, ethnic minorities etc.) in order that the process is fully inclusive.
- **results** of consultations should be made available to all residents.
- the **Annual Town Public Meeting** (and three additional public meetings) will continue to obtain the views of residents on matters affecting the community.
- **Town Councillor surgeries:** give residents the opportunity to discuss their concerns with elected members.

3. **Support**

- supporting **local organisations** and engaging with them will help them in meeting their own aims and objectives.
- supporting **local projects** and participating in local events will raise the awareness of the Town Council and its aims and objectives.
- supporting **residents of the town** in shaping the future of their area will develop a more cohesive community.

4. **Joint Working**

- Working with **local voluntary and community groups** to improve the quality of life for residents.
- Working with **partner agencies** (e.g. Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Merseyside Police, Housing Trust and Age Concern Knowsley) to ensure an improvement in the quality and delivery of services.
- Working with **neighbouring parish/town councils** to seek solutions to common problems.

STANDARDS

At the very heart of its engagement activities, Whiston Town Council will have the following standards:

- **Co-ordination and partnership**: provide leadership in order that community engagement influences services and plans.
- **access**: ensure that there is equal access to all services and that services meet the needs of all communities.
- **inclusion**: involve groups and individuals that are typically excluded from services.
- **clarity**: ensure that community engagement activities are realistic and that expectations are not raised unrealistically.
- **confidentiality**: ensure awareness of confidentiality issues in community engagement activities with particular regard to the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- **integrity**: ensure that the rights and dignity of all participants are respected at all times.

STRATEGY MEASUREMENT

Success will be measured by reviews of consultation outcomes, monitoring residents' participation in consultation processes and involvement in local projects and events.

The Community Engagement Strategy will be reviewed and amended as appropriate.

CONCLUSION

This Strategy supports coordinated community engagement and consultation activities --- the key to successful implementation is effective management and governance.

The ultimate responsibility for the success of the Community Engagement Strategy rests with the **elected members** (who actively work to enhance community engagement in Town Council decision making) and the **Clerk of the Council** (who is responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the Strategy).