

# Community Engagement Strategy 2021-24

## Introduction

We are committed to delivering great value services for Grovesend and Waungron residents. The effectiveness of how we deliver our vision is determined to a significant extent by the quality of our engagement. This strategy outlines the approach we will take to ensure our engagement activity is the best possible and helps to achieve our vision.

Effective engagement will ensure that our vision, priorities and outcomes are clearly understood by local people, our workforce, our partners, local businesses and other stakeholders. Ensuring our activities are underpinned by appropriate engagement with our people is essential for the delivery of our corporate priorities.

To help deliver this strategy and further improve and expand on our engagement activities we have identified 3 key objectives to:

- Ensure that all communities are able to participate effectively;
- Manage and coordinate community engagement activities to ensure consistency and quality;
- Improve the communication of outcomes.

## Context

The council is keen to enhance performance by ensuring we understand what people want and that people understand what we do. This will be supported through effective communication and engagement with our communities. The council already has strong links with the local community and voluntary sector as well as other public service providers and recognises the importance of ensuring consultation and engagement includes these organisations.

## Our Stakeholders

Grovesend and Waungron Community Council engages with a wide range of stakeholders:

- Local people;
- Partner organisations within the public, private, community and voluntary sectors;
- Employees;
- MP's, Ministers and organisations such as the Local Government Association and central government departments;
- Media organisations

## Purpose of this Strategy

This strategy provides the corporate framework for undertaking engagement activities either by Community Councillors or by a third party on behalf of the council.

The council also incorporates the Equality Act into its consultation and engagement work, and operates alongside the Councils Communication Strategy. Services will use this strategy when undertaking service specific consultation and engagement exercises and apply the principles when they work with residents, communities, staff, businesses and customers.

## The main requirements of the Community Engagement Strategy are to:

- Measure customer satisfaction and opinion in relation to service delivery and to be able to track changes over time;
- Measure feelings, opinions and issues around overall quality of life;
- Improve the delivery and take up of our services by using feedback to shape services;
- Support bids for resources or the allocation of resources through the provision of customer data;
- Support the role of councillors in understanding the needs and wishes of the communities we serve.

# What is community engagement and consultation?

Community engagement is a two-way process. It involves communities in making decisions that can lead to improvements in the quality of their life and allow them to take part in shaping the places in which they live and the services they receive. Engagement requires much more active involvement from communities than consultation alone, with an emphasis on building relationships so that participants remain involved in an ongoing basis. However, it is recognised that people vary in their desire to be engaged and this must be respected. Communities can be many things such as:

- Communities of Place – people within a defined geographical area, often communities of place refer to the very local neighbourhoods or parishes rather than wider geographical areas;
- Communities of Interest – people who share a particular experience, interest or characteristics other than place;
- Communities may define themselves and definitions do change, people can belong to more than one community and communities themselves are often very diverse.

Consultation is defined as the process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based upon a genuine exchange of views, with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action. It can involve:

- Passing information and receiving comments;
- Seeking opinions on options before a decision is reached;
- Seeking to involve local people, communities and other stakeholders;
- Listening and learning from local people, communities and stakeholders.

## Why do we engage?

There are many benefits of effective community engagement for the Council and our local communities.

## Community engagement helps the Council to:

- Better understand and respond to the needs of local people;
- Be more accountable to local people;
- Plan and deliver improved 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;
- Meet statutory requirements such as the best value duties under the Local Government Act.

## The local people will:

- Be encouraged to have a greater say and choice in the design and delivery of local services;
- Develop new skills and expertise;
- Be supported to become better informed about the councils work and feel involved in decision making.

However, engagement activities which are done badly can lead to misleading results, undermine the whole process and reduce the prospect that people will engage again. There are also times when it is not appropriate, for example:

- If the decision is under strict direction from Government and the direction cannot be changed or altered;
- If we have already recently asked for views on a similar topic;
- If the council is in the process of implementing plans that have previously been adopted and to which it has committed significant resources.

## How we will engage and consult?

We will ensure our engagement activities are inclusive to all and effective in gathering feedback that can help drive service improvement.

Engagement is part of the process of actively involving people in the delivery and development of services. When engaging with residents, community, businesses and customers, all services should follow these distinct principles for effective engagement.

# Model of Engagement

The council's model of engagement	Inform	Consult	Involve	Empower
<b>Goal</b>	To provide balanced and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has happened.	Two way interactions to obtain feedback on ideas, alternatives or proposals to inform our decision making.	Participatory process to ensure people's concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	Working together to develop a shared understanding of all issues and to work out alternatives and a preferred solution for joint decision making.
<b>Approach</b>	We will keep you informed about a decision or direction.	We will explore options and opportunities, and seek to understand your concerns or preferences.	We will involve you in the process so your ideas, concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives or final decisions.	We will collaborate with you so your advice innovation and recommendations are included in the final decision that we make together.

## Applying this strategy

Through the delivery of this strategy we want to ensure that we:

- Establish an environment in which the council and the local community can exchange views, ideas and information;
- Have a consistent approach across the council and ensure that all engagement processes and activities are focused and effective;
- Are proactive and open to new and innovative ways to engage and maintain ongoing engagement with the whole community.

In order to achieve this we will:

- Demonstrate a clear commitment to community engagement;
- Have a co-ordinated but flexible approach that meets the needs of all our services and ensures a consistent approach across the council;
- Work in partnership with others where appropriate to ensure effective joined up engagement activities;
- Undertake engagement activities in line with clear standards and good practice;
- Ensure our consultation and engagement is open, accessible and inclusive.

## Overview of Grovesend and Waungron's Community Engagement Standards

- Inclusiveness and Diversity – recognising and valuing the diversity of our community and the different strengths people and groups bring. Working to promote equality of opportunities and empower people to have their voices heard;
- Openness, Respect and Accountability - leading to a better understanding of issues, mutual respect for different points of view and workable solutions with clear lines of accountability;
- Leadership – supporting and facilitating discussion, actively seeking support and partnerships and building leadership capacity across the community;
- Purpose – establishing a clear purpose of engagement that provides direction and guidance, creating realistic capacity across the community;
- Information Sharing - providing clear and accurate information in a timely manner;

- Feedback and Evaluation – Letting participants know how their opinions and information have contributed to the decision;
- Informative and Impartial – People must be informed to make reasoned decisions but it should not lead local people to a response;
- Understandable – Plain Language must be used.

## How will the Council ensure engagement is effective?

### Measuring performance

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 Erewash Borough Council involves local residents in its decision making;
- Evidence of information from consultation and engagement that influences council services.

### What we do with the data and findings?

With the consultation findings we will:

- Anonymise the data we receive;
- Make the findings as freely available as possible;
- Share the information to the appropriate audiences interested in the consultation;
- Provide evidence and help inform decisions;
- Provide evidence for the guiding and development of policies and strategies;
- Provide feedback to services in order to make improvements.

Results from consultation and engagement exercises will be used alongside advice from experts, officer recommendations, Council strategy and priorities, and Councillor opinion to help finalise decisions or shape future plans.

### Monitoring and reviewing progress

The strategy will be formally reviewed every three years.

### Our approach to consultation

Where specific standards are not in place (i.e. the statement of community involvement,) we will:

- Ensure that the objectives of any consultation are clear e.g. to gather new ideas or test options;
- Only use community engagement and consultation processes when there is a real opportunity for people to influence and change decisions and services, and be honest where decisions are non-negotiable;
- Ensure that we always consult when there is a statutory requirement to do so, and where it is good practice to do so;
- Ensure that community engagement activities are realistic and that expectations are not raised unnecessarily or unrealistically;
- Provide leadership from senior management to ensure that community engagement influences services and plans.

When we consult we will:

- Coordinate community engagement activities internally and with partners where required, to avoid duplication and consultation fatigue;
- 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. Timescales may vary between 2 and 12 weeks;
- Establish the timing and length of the consultation on a case by case basis and make sure they are realistic to enable all stakeholders sufficient time to provide a considered response;
- Avoid consulting during main holiday periods, where possible and if not, make allowances within the timeframe;

- Avoid consultation exercises during the 6 week period before local or national election periods.

How we will consult:

- Consider the most appropriate type of engagement for each circumstance. The type and scale of consultation will be appropriate to the potential impacts of the proposal;
- Ensure that the consultation captures the full range of stakeholders affected;
- Provide information in an easily understandable format, using plain language and clarifying the key issues;
- Ensure that we take into account particular needs and work together to overcome where possible any difficulties participants may have to enable them to fully participate in the activity;
- Ensure that, where appropriate, equalities monitoring takes place, and that survey data is broken down into protected groups. This will enable us to ensure that our services are fair and accessible to all groups;
- Ensure that participation is voluntary, and that participants can withdraw at any time;
- Ensure that the rights and dignity of all participants are respected at all times, and give careful consideration to activities, information and questions to ensure that they do not offend, cause distress or embarrassment;
- Treat information confidentially, with particular regard to the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.

How we will provide feedback and ensure transparency:

- Be open and transparent about the aims of community engagement activity and what stage of development the policy or proposal has reached;
- Be clear about what aspects of the policy or proposal being consulted on are open to change and what decisions have already been taken;
- Ensure participants know what they are agreeing to take part in and how the information will be used;
- Make sufficient information available to stakeholders to enable them to make informed comments;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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.