

**DRAFT**

**Bromsgrove District Council  
Community Engagement Strategy**

**2017-2020**

## 1. Why engagement?

Bromsgrove District Council wants to ensure that people feel well informed about local issues, have opportunities to get involved, influence local decision making and to tell the Council what they think about its policies, procedures, service delivery and work with partner organisations.

Community engagement helps the Council to understand different views within the community. 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. By identifying the 'cold spots' in demand data the Council can start to understand the barriers that might be stopping certain voices being heard. We also need to use the most appropriate engagement technique/s so we get meaningful data. This will help the Council to make better decisions and meet the needs of our communities more effectively. Community engagement is vital if we are to deliver the strategic purposes and priorities of the Council as there are elements of our work which can only be understood by engaging directly with our communities.

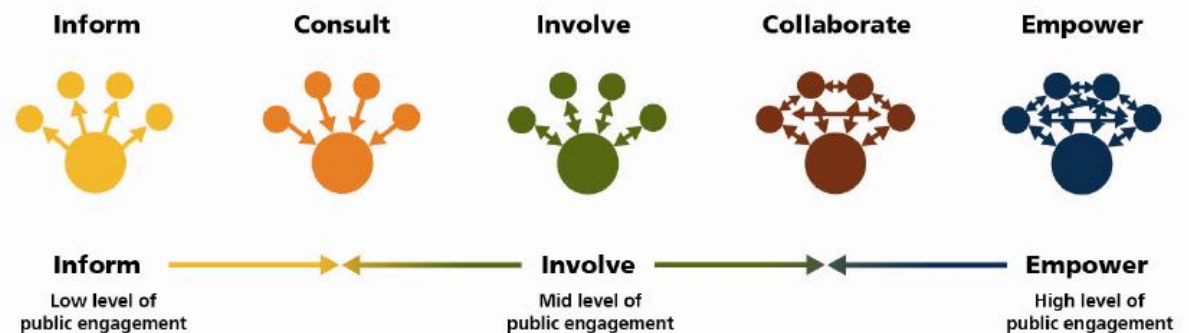
The purpose of this Community Engagement Strategy is to build on the good practices that already exist within the Council; plan a way forward for engaging with local people in the future and ultimately increase the number and diversity of people who engage with the Council. Community engagement is a powerful tool that can provide invaluable information and help to build confidence within the community but only if it is 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.

## 2. What do we mean by 'community engagement'?

Community engagement is about giving people the confidence, 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.

One way to think about community engagement is as a set of steps ranging from providing information right up to decision making responsibilities.

Every type of involvement is important in the community engagement process and different methods will be used depending on the activity and circumstances. Sometimes it may be appropriate to inform or consult on some activities, while at other times involving communities and individuals in much greater depth would be more appropriate.



## Inform

Where local people are given a wide range of information on issues affecting them, such as how to access public services, how they are performing or proposed changes to how a service is delivered, but are not invited to influence them directly.

### Methods can include

- Posters, postcards, fliers, banners, newsletters, advertising, press releases, email, texts alerts, Twitter, web updates, Facebook, podcasts
- Information stalls/ roadshows, public meetings

## Consult

This happens when the views of local people are appropriately sought to influence decision making processes about issues that might affect them. This could be a future change to a service or an area specific issue.

### Methods can include

- Questionnaires, surveys, interviews, resident/citizen/user panels, community groups consultation events, workshops
- Online consultation- using SmartSurvey platform

## Involve

Where local people influence issues such as service delivery and design on a district-wide or more local basis by being included in decision making. Involvement may be ongoing and give opportunities for the community to put forward ideas, options and actions.

### Methods can include

- Community led plans (e.g. parish plans/neighbourhood plans)
- Comments, complaints, petitions, existing demand data, interaction with Members of Parliament, elected District Councillors

## Collaborate

Where both the council and the community are working in partnership on all aspects of decision making including the development of options and identifying preferred solutions.

### Methods can include

- Focus groups
- Community needs analysis

## Empower

This is where communities are empowered to make decisions and take control of projects and service delivery.

### Methods can include

- User led commissioning e.g. delegated budgeting, community asset transfer or direct service delivery

### 3. What do we mean by community?

A community is not always determined by a geographical area; therefore understanding how the community is defined is key to planning and delivering effective engagement. Ways to define a community include:

**Community of place or neighbourhood:** A community linked to a particular geographical location such as a ward, village, market town or a housing estate. This location will usually have physical boundaries although they are not always obvious to people who do not live there.

**Community of interest:** A group of people with a shared interest or experience. A community of interest includes service users (for example, service users of the council) as well as people interested in a particular issue (for example climate change).

**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, young people, faith groups, older people, 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. So it is important to let people define for themselves which communities they wish to be identified with.

### 4. Legal standards

Certain functions of the Council are subject to statutory requirements to consult and there is specific legislation that needs to be taken account of, including the Local Government Act 1999 and the Equalities Act 2010. Community Engagement is particularly important when making difficult financial decisions; if we are proposing to stop, reduce or change a service then we need have relevant evidence as to how we have engaged with communities who are potentially affected by the proposal.

#### **Doctrine of legitimate expectation (common law) (taken from LGA Guide to Engagement February 2017)**

It is now seen as common law that consultees have the right to expect a fair process which incorporates guidance and management promises. The legitimate expectation applies:

- when there has been a clear promise of consultation
- where official guidance or policies imply a promise to act in a particular way
- where there is a withdrawal of a benefit with significant impacts to be considered
- where the nature of the relationship would create unfairness if there were to be inadequate consultation.

Where people have come to legitimately expect a process of consultation there are grounds for a judicial review should a public consultation not take place. A consultation must also be conducted properly should the choice be taken to embark on one (whether a legal requirement exists for it or not).

### **The Gunning Principles (1985)**

The Gunning Principles define that a consultation is only legitimate when these four principles are met:

1. **proposals are still at a formative stage** A final decision has not yet been made, or predetermined, by the decision makers
2. **there is sufficient information to give 'intelligent consideration'** The information provided must relate to the consultation and must be available, accessible, and easily interpretable for consultees to provide an informed response
3. **there is adequate time for consideration and response** There must be sufficient opportunity for consultees to participate in the consultation. The length of time given for consultee to respond can vary depending on the subject and extent of impact of the consultation
4. **'conscientious consideration' must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made** Decision-makers should be able to provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account

The Gunning Principles have formed a strong legal foundation from which the legitimacy of public consultations is assessed, and are frequently referred to as a legal basis for judicial review decisions.

## **5. Benefits of effective community engagement**

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 local people;
- be more accountable to local people;
- 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.

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. Engaging with the public when a decision has already been made is pointless and could mean that relevant and potentially costly issues are missed. It is much easier to address issues before decisions have been made as they can be incorporated into a new service design or policy proposal.

There are also times when community engagement is not appropriate, for example:

- If the decision is under strict direction from Government
- 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.

## **6. How are we going to deliver this strategy?**

This is the responsibility of the whole Council, as ensuring that we understand the issues affecting our residents and customers is essential if we are to deliver effective and targeted services. This is particularly relevant when making difficult financial decisions; if we are proposing to stop, reduce or change a service then we must have the relevant evidence to justify this. This is where community engagement linked to other areas such as system performance, communications, equalities and customer service.

Targeted community engagement must be led by the relevant service area as they are the experts in their field, enabled by the Policy Team, who can support with the development, implementation and analysis of engagement activities. Community engagement also forms a statutory requirement for service areas such as community safety and planning (articulated through the Statement of Community Involvement). Corporate engagement activities will involve key officers and stakeholders to ensure that these opportunities provide the Council with the most relevant and timely evidence possible.

Elected Members are a key part of engagement with communities; managers and the Policy Team can support Councillors with engagement activities and the scrutiny process allows formal consultation and engagement to inform and influence decision making.

To ensure consistence, the following principles set out how we are going to make certain that our engagement activity is flexible, focused and appropriate for the diverse needs of the communities. To achieve this, the Council will:

- Develop a strategic approach that provides clear guidance and promotes successful engagement across all service areas.
- Plan and co-ordinate activities, the use of resources and, where possible, work collaboratively.
- Actively encourage involvement from all communities, including those from traditionally 'hard-to-reach' groups.
- Use the most appropriate method to consult and engage making the experience interesting, relevant and worthwhile for participants.
- Develop and implement new approaches to how we carry out engagement activities.
- Communicate results and ensure that the outcomes are used to inform the Council's policies and decision-making processes.
- 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.

## **7. Measuring our progress**

It is important to know whether this strategy is making a difference and that we are working to our principles. Examples of ways we can measure success will include:

- Responses received to our engagement activities
- Attendance at council committee meetings
- Statistics from the website
- Statistics from Facebook and Twitter

## **8. How to contact us**

To give us your views, get involved or for further information please contact the Policy Team at [policy@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk](mailto:policy@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk) or 01527 548284

To find out about the councils engagement activities please contact us or just go to [www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/consultations)

**If you need this information in another language or format, please contact us to discuss how we can best meet your needs.**

**Email: [equalities@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk) or Phone: 01527 548284**