

BRIXHAM TOWN COUNCIL TOWN ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY



Community Engagement Strategy adopted on 06.05.09
Review History: May 2010, May 2011, May 2012, July 2013
Date of next review: May 2014

Introduction

Brixham Town Council's Town engagement activities are contained in this strategy for the Town to coordinate the Council's engagement with all communities within the Town - based on our belief that:

- All people within Brixham should be involved in the decisions that affect them
- All people within Brixham deserve high quality public services, shaped around their needs
- Town Council policies and strategies should reflect local priorities, requirements and aspirations.

This Town engagement strategy recognises the diversity of our town, the importance of capacity building and the need to provide appropriate opportunities for local people and the Town to participate in influencing service delivery, decision making and policy development.

Brixham Town Council's vision

This strategy supports the council's vision of Brixham as:

- A Town that protects the environment in which it is situated and embraces the modern world.
- A lifestyle that benefits from improving the living standards of its people.
- A Town that enjoys a safe, secure and healthy way of life
- A caring Town that provides for all its age groups.
- A Town that takes every opportunity to help itself.
- In the face of changes to the traditional industries, such as fishing, a forward looking Town adopting new activities to sustain the economic viability of the area.

This strategy provides a focus for all engagement activities, policies and processes to align with the council's objectives to create an improved quality of life by working with people and partners, devolving decision-making and empowering individuals and communities to contribute and influence services.

What is the overall aim of the Town Engagement Strategy?

This Town Engagement Strategy aims to support a strong, active and inclusive town that is informed and involved in decision-making and enable us to improve public services to enhance quality of life across Brixham. By this we mean:

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

What are our objectives?

The objectives below identify how we can contribute to the Council's vision and ensure that the Town Engagement Strategy delivers an effective and coordinated approach to Town engagement for the benefit of all people and the diverse communities of Brixham. We will:

- **strengthen, develop and sustain opportunities** for local people and groups to influence what happens in their town
- provide opportunities for community groups to **shape and influence** the development and delivery of quality services and policies that reflect local needs and priorities
- **manage and coordinate** engagement activities to ensure consistency, quality and partner participation and avoid duplication
- ensure that town engagement activities **provide opportunities** for participation for all sections of the town
- listen to communities and ensure **feedback** to participants about the outcomes of consultation and engagement
- provide **variety, flexibility and choice** in town engagement activities
- listen and learn from our own and others' experience and share town engagement skills and knowledge of putting the citizen at the heart of decision-making.

How will we achieve the objectives?

Detailed consideration will be given to all projects, proposals and policies to ensure we achieve our objectives set out above. Such decisions will be continually monitored and reviewed to ensure they are flexible and evolve to respond to the changing needs of our communities and Town engagement activities.

Our priorities include:

- improving **coordination** and governance of Town engagement activities, by the development of protocols, toolkits and frameworks that reach out and involve the Town as a whole
- developing a **web-based blog resource** to engage consultation with the local Town and wider interest Town
- providing a regular surgery to make councillors and officers **more accessible and inclusive**

- **developing measures to harness** the views and opinions of people and groups who might be missed out of Town engagement activities
- improve coordination with **partners** in engagement activities
- raise awareness of **volunteering** opportunities in the Town
- developing and enhancing **skills and expertise** in engagement and participation
- participating in **local networks** to share knowledge and experience of Town engagement activities in other areas
- **rolling out** our Town engagement strategy through councillors and others involved in Town engagement activities.

Who is this strategy for?

We recognise that the council alone cannot achieve the ambitions in this strategy. Everyone has a part to play in making this Town Engagement Strategy work, particularly:

- all Brixham residents and those with second homes or who visit this area
- elected members, who play a key role in delivering the aims in this strategy
- Town clerk and any staff or volunteers – everyone is involved in Town engagement activity in various forms
- voluntary sector and other organisations who provide local services, work directly with local groups and with members of usually excluded groups and represent the views of their sectors
- partners, by working with other organisations and partnerships to make sure that services across the city complement each other.

Brixham Town Council seeks to work with other organisations, such as the police, educational establishments, health service, and all groups outside and within the Town together with individuals from the Town, voluntary and private sectors to make sure that engagement activities influence the future direction of the Town.

We also know that we need to work with our local and visiting communities to encourage effective Town engagement and ensure that processes are flexible and can be tailored to different groups and individuals in different areas of the Town. We understand that sometimes people are reluctant to get involved and we will work with other partners to ensure that Town engagement is as straightforward as possible and targeted appropriately.

What do we mean by Town engagement?

Town engagement can mean different things to different people, different communities and different services and situations. We have designed our Town Engagement Strategy to ensure that we can provide the most appropriate means for people and communities to be involved and give feedback. The various means of Town engagement are:

- **Information** supports all types of Town engagement and keeps people informed about such things as decisions, services and local events (e.g. Town Council newsletter with all local information. The Town Council's website is accessible and it includes local information and useful links).
- **Consultation** can be used when there is a decision to make about something or when there are a number of choices about the details (e.g. Town plan, questionnaires, newsletter feedback, twitter, Council website blog).
- **Attending meetings.** This is when members of the public are welcomed and encouraged to attend any Town council meeting (such dates and times of meetings are posted on the Brixham Town Council noticeboard, website or can be obtained from the Clerk) to put forward their concerns, suggestions or offer assistance within the 'Open Forum' section of the meeting. Or alternatively people can attend the Annual Town Meeting and take part.
- **Comment.** Everyone resident, second home, visitor or partner is welcome to put forward their thoughts, ideas, concerns, criticisms or worries by telephone, email or written and the Town council will consider and respond to such.

Every type of involvement is important in the Town 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 we will seek to involve communities and individual in much greater depth. Our aim is to work towards devolved decision-making and supporting independent Town initiatives wherever possible and to demonstrate where this type of Town engagement activity can make genuine improvements to services.

What are our Town engagement standards?

Co-ordination & Partnership

co-ordinate Town engagement activities, with the Town council and partners, to avoid duplication and 'consultation fatigue', caused by too much consultation, too little action and feedback

provide leadership, to ensure that Town engagement influences services and plans.

Access & Inclusion

ensure that we take into account particular needs and overcome any difficulties to enable all to participate

involve communities that are usually excluded

ensure that there is equal access to services, and that services meet the needs of all communities

ensure adherence to health and safety regulations

Clarity of Purpose

only use Town engagement and consultation processes when there is a real opportunity for people to influence and change decisions and services

be open and honest about the aims of Town engagement activity and what it hopes to achieve

ensure that Town engagement activities are achievable and that expectations are realistic

have clear processes to feed back on Town engagement activity and outcomes and give reasons if unable to deliver on expectations

ensure participants know what they are agreeing to take part in and how the information will be used

Confidentiality

ensure awareness of confidentiality issues in Town engagement activities, with particular regard to the Freedom of Information Act (Confidentiality issues will be adhered to, within the constraints of legislation)

Integrity

ensure that Town engagement activities are voluntary, and that participants can withdraw at any time

ensure that information obtained from Town engagement activities is honestly interpreted

ensure that the rights and dignity of all participants are respected at all times

respect the rights of participants to decide how much to reveal about themselves

give careful consideration to activities, information and questions to ensure that they do not offend, cause distress or embarrassment

Visibility

ensure that those most directly affected by plans and decisions are aware of opportunities for Town engagement

engage with key stakeholders and/or representative groups in advance of specific Town engagement activities – to provide advance warning and to seek views on the most effective means of publicity

How will we measure our achievements?

It is important for us to know whether we are achieving our vision for this Town Engagement Strategy and we welcome any feedback and will openly and honestly consider such and feedback to any such communication.

This strategy will be reviewed annually and due consideration given to any amendments suggested or required.

Who is responsible for this Town Engagement Strategy?

This strategy supports co-ordinated Town engagement and consultation activities – the key to successful implementation of the strategy is effective management and governance. The following structure provides a governance framework for this Town Engagement Strategy.

The Elected Members will actively work to enhance Town engagement activity in council decision-making.

The Town Clerk is responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the strategy.