ST IVES TOWN COUNCIL

Community Engagement and Empowerment Strategy

June 2024

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St Ives Community Engagement and Empowerment Strategy

OUR AMBITION

St Ives Town Council's ambition is to be recognised as a Council that works positively with its residents, communities and partners.

This Community Consultation and Engagement Strategy aims to support strong, active and inclusive communities, who are informed and involved in decision-making. It outlines the approach we will take to ensure our engagement activity is the best possible.

KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGY

To deliver an effective and coordinated approach to consultation and community engagement for the benefit of all people and the diverse communities of the St Ives parish.

We will:

- strengthen, develop and sustain opportunities for local people and groups to influence what happens in their communities
- provide opportunities 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 community engagement activities provide opportunities for participation for all sections of the community, particularly hard to reach groups who are less able or likely to participate in community engagement
- listen to communities and ensure feedback to participants about the outcomes of consultation and engagement
- Wherever possible, provide variety and flexibility and choice in community engagement activities
- listen and learn from our experience and share good practice
- develop the organisation's community engagement skills and knowledge

GETTING THERE

We will apply the principles of the strategy when progressing all projects and new initiatives and in reviewing services and policies. Below is a list of **priority actions** which we have identified to help deliver the aims of the strategy.

- mapping the needs and priorities of diverse key groups and communities in the parish, both geographical and communities of interest and identifying ways to tailor consultation and engagement
- innovating to ensure more impactful and effective methods to reach difficult to reach or disadvantaged groups
- supporting and developing engagement forums
- promoting open access to all Council meetings
- livestreaming meetings and using youtube as a streaming platform
- offering opportunities for face to face engagement with councillors
- ensuring officers and councillors are accessible and meetings are inclusive
- improve coordination with partners in engagement activities
- raise awareness of volunteering opportunities in the parish
- developing and enhancing skills and expertise in engagement and participation, including staff specialisms around young people
- fostering stronger connections with community and voluntary groups

- participating in local networks and professional bodies to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

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 on 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.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is the idea that everyone who is impacted by an issue or their community, should have a say in the decision making around it. It is a two-way conversation that can allow communities to influence decisions that shape 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.

WHY ENGAGE?

There are many reasons and benefits for engaging communities and putting them at the centre of decision making. We value that people and communities want to be more involved, work together, improve our relationships, and have better ongoing conversations with us. Effective engagement means we can:

1. ensure that our plans and priorities are clearly understood by local people, our workforce, our partners, local businesses and other stakeholders.
2. ensure we understand the community's priorities and be more accountable
3. be efficient and effective as an organisation and work within our budgets.
4. test out our ideas and identify how to overcome challenges
5. ensure we are better informed and projects are shaped from the bottom up with improved outcomes.
6. build stronger relationships with our communities and stakeholders
7. ensure that local people understand what we do and how our role links with other partners and the wider public sector.
8. measure how the Council is performing

WORKING WITH OTHERS

1. We will work closely with others to ensure as far as possible that consultation and engagement activities are shared and co-ordinated. Where there are differences in priorities and messages, we will aim to address them so that communities hear a shared view.

2. Alongside our partners in the public sector, we recognise and value the importance of a strong and vibrant voluntary and community sector in developing and sustaining our community.

3. As a thriving seaside town, businesses also play a vital part of our community and have an important contribution to make in shaping policies and decisions for the future.

4. We will work alongside partners and co-ordinate consultation and engagement as far as possible to reduce inefficiency and resident fatigue.

5. We have a strong understanding of our partners and those we collaborate and actively work with, but we will keep this under regular review to ensure that interests, groups or communities are not overlooked.

OUR KEY PARTNERS

- Local people both generally and as customers for our services
- Our staff
- Cornwall Council and the wider public sector family
- St Ives Town Deal Board
- Community and voluntary sector organisations
- St Ives BID and business forums
- St Ives Climate Coalition
- Our visitors

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The Strategy recognises some of the barriers we face in fostering and strengthening consultation and engagement. Some of these reflect the specific profile of the St Ives communities and its wider role as a popular seaside visitor area.

We understand that sometimes people are reluctant to get involved and we will work with other partners to ensure that community engagement is as straightforward as possible and targeted appropriately.

We recognise the limits and constraints placed on us from being a visitor economy with a high proportion of holiday and second homes. Conversely, there are often issues and policies which we would want to talk to visitors about and may need to develop innovative ways to seek their views.

- 20% of properties in the parish are let as short term holiday lets and second homes, meaning there are fewer long term permanent residents in the community utilising local services all year round
- Whilst St Ives is seen as prosperous market town, there are large areas of deprivation, partially hidden
- The busy seasonal economy makes it difficult to engage and consult with residents working in the busy summer months

- The Town of St Ives is a strong service centre for the parish, but the majority of permanent residents are now living in dispersed communities within the settlements of Lelant, Halsetown and Carbis Bay each have their own distinct identity and priorities
- St Ives is busy town and travel to meetings, workshops and exhibitions can be challenging

Consultation and Engagement Channels and Tools

Community consultation and engagement activities can all be valuable. We will use different approaches, depending on the activity, issue and circumstances.

Our strategy sets out four levels of consultation and engagement. We will always keep communities and partners informed about what we are doing (level 1), but at other times we will seek views and consult on projects, policies and ideas (level 2) We will work as much as possible with communities and individuals in much greater depth (level 3) and aspire to identify more opportunities to involve communities in the design of services and manage projects directly (level 4). We will consider the most appropriate level of engagement.

Our current channels and tools we use are summarised in appendix A.

Level 1: INFORM:
We will keep you informed and provide balanced and objective information to tell you about something that is going to happen or has happened.

We will achieve this by

1. maintaining open access physical receptions at the Guildhall and the Cornerstone Library Building to ensure our staff and councillors are accessible
2. keeping our website rich in content up to date
3. using a diverse range of traditional and digital tools
4. we will ensure that we always use additional communication channels including print media and community groups and networks for people who are unable to access social media.
5. continuously developing our skills and reach across social media channels
6. offering mailing list sign ups and regular newsletters
7. ensuring as many of our meetings as possible are open meetings and publicising agendas and minutes in good time
8. using timely mail and email correspondence and publishing contact details and information about the organisation
9. live streaming meetings and events
10. using a broad range of communication methods and channels to provide information about council activities in order to signpost residents, visitors and others to the right services and, where appropriate and work together to ensure the Council's limited resources are spent in the right places.

Level 2 CONSULT
We will ask you for your views and *have a two way communication with you to obtain views and ideas and explore solutions*

We will achieve this by

1. Making sure the relevant groups and stakeholders are included when planning any consultation, for example, local people, businesses, voluntary

sector organisations, visitors and other organisations in important decisions which have an impact on them.
2. building relationships with local representative groups and forums to establish regular communication channels, including setting up new groups where there is a gap
3. choosing consultation channels which have the widest reach and are tailored and appropriate for each audience.
4. ensuring consultation materials – posters, postcards questionnaires are well designed in clear language and using images and illustrations and offered in different formats
5. wherever, possible adopting digital first principles
6. allowing a reasonable lead-in time when we ask for views and engage in a timely way, giving time for everyone to have their say. If there are times we cannot do this, we will explain clearly why.
7. using comments and messaging functions in social media platforms to promote debate and as far as possible respond directly to comments and questions.
8. using existing communication channels of partner organisations to reach wider audiences
9. regularly using on line surveys and polls
10. ensuring all our communication channels allow for feedback and comment
11. providing feedback to our communities and explain how we listened to their views, giving reasons if we have not been able to take everyone's views into account.

Level 3: ENGAGE: Involving and collaborating with others
We will involve you in the decision-making process to gather ideas, concerns and aspirations and reflect these in options and any final decision.

We will achieve this by

1. Involving communities and stakeholders, giving them opportunities to become involved in making important decisions and help find solutions, for example setting standards for the services we deliver
2. Always having public question time and open access as part of Council meetings
3. Introducing and supporting cross sector working groups which have broad membership, for example the transport sub-group, Climate Action, programming for concert hall, St Ives Bay Youth Council, St Ives Cultural Partnership
4. Work with sports clubs and groups including St Ives football, rugby, sailing, surf lifesaving clubs, to further build their engagement with the community, especially young people.
5. We will feedback to communities and organisations outlining how their contributions have influenced decisions made by the Council and what has changed or improved as a result.

Level 4: EMPOWER
Acting together to take decisions and shape and design services and projects and develop common solutions.

We will achieve this by

1. seeking a consensus around significant issues and challenges for St Ives and developing a single community response, for example collaborating on campaigns including chemical free seas, local housing, climate change, traffic and transport
2. ensuring that local communities and organisations play a leading role in the review of the Neighbourhood Plan
3. working together to give people a better sense of ownership of the services and activities available to them, promoting volunteering across our services
4. identifying opportunities for communities and organisations to co-design services, for example, programming events at the concert hall, and services in the Cornerstone building, designing the layout of new green spaces with local communities.
5. strengthening partnerships with local affordable housing providers and their work on affordable homes and resident engagement in disadvantaged communities
6. programming and co-commissioning community weekends, festivals, performance and other events.
7. working with businesses and St Ives Climate Coalition to deliver shared ambitions around sustainable tourism and climate change
8. supporting capacity building for key community groups, making use of collaboration agreements and grant funding where resident and community groups can better look after local assets or services.
9. ensuring that all new contracts include social value outcomes around community consultation, work experience and engagement.

SETTING STANDARDS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Delivering consultation and engagement is not just about what we do, but how we do it. Across our consultation and engagement activities we will aim to meet these standards:

CO-ORDINATING WITH OTHERS

1. We will co-ordinate community engagement activities, with local partners and the wider public sector, to avoid duplication and 'consultation fatigue',
2. We will provide leadership, to ensure that community engagement influences services and plans of other organisations and represent our community's views
3. We will aim to work alongside public sector partners including Cornwall Council, health and emergency services to ensure as far as possible we can convey common messages and speak with one voice.

BEING INCLUSIVE

- We will work together to ensure that the challenges within different types of local community are understood and better represented. This involves communities of place - the different needs of St Ives Town, Carbis Bay, Lelant and Halsetown, but also communities of shared interests and the needs of specific groups such as children and young people, older people, low income groups and businesses

- We will at all times understand and ensure that our approach recognises, respects and is fully inclusive of those with protected characteristics by virtue of age, disability, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, race religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

We will

1. tailor our engagement activities to respond to the needs and difficulties some may experience.
2. provide information in an easily understandable format, using plain language and clarifying the key issues
3. be flexible about dates and times and venues and delivering activities through outreach or remotely
4. always aim to involve more difficult to reach groups in our communities
5. 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

OPENNESS AND HONESTY

We will

1. be open about the challenges facing the Council and what we can and cannot do, but, if so, we will work to find alternative solutions
2. only engage and consult when there is a real opportunity for people to influence and change decisions and services
3. explain when this is not possible and give reasons
4. be open and honest about our aims and what we hope to achieve
5. ensure that community engagement activities are realistic and that expectations are not unfairly raised
6. have clear processes to feed-back and give reasons if we are unable to deliver on expectations
7. be clear how the information will be used

CONFIDENTIALITY AND INTEGRITY

We will

1. be aware of confidentiality issues in carrying out consultation and engagement
2. always take our responsibilities under Data Protection and Freedom of Information legislation very seriously
3. ensure that community engagement is voluntary, and that participants can withdraw at any time
4. always interpret the information we gather fairly
5. respect the rights and dignity of all participants
6. consider how we develop activities, information and questions to ensure that they do not cause upset or offend.

FEEDBACK

1. We will welcome constructive feedback and use it to inform our progress and performance on this strategy
2. We will honestly and openly consider all views and opinions

3. We will hold an annual questions and answers meeting each year, accompanied by our annual report and live stream the event.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

We will collect information and data from our consultation and engagement activities and make use of feedback and analytics to evaluate our performance. Measures will include:

- Number of engagements in social media activity, campaigns
- Number of people taking part in consultations, response rates
- Evidence of whether participants felt listened to
- Number of people reached with different demographic profiles
- Evidence of different forms of engagement used to reach specific communities Evidence of the different communities who have provided feedback
- Number of complaints about how we engage and inform people
- Number of cross sector groups which meet regularly
- Evidence of positive feedback
- Greater use of website and social media channels (hits/heat maps)
- Examples of activity we have implemented as a result of engagement - and things we have changed
- Evidence of co-design (partner agreements, funding, service design)
- Taking time

REVIEWING PROGRESS

1. We will review the strategy annually and learn lessons from consultation and engagement activities, which has been completed throughout the year.
2. We will consider an action plan for the year ahead.

The strategy will be led and owned by Councillors and Staff of St Ives Town Council.

APPENDIX A

Current Communication and Consultation Channels and Tools

Website
For accessing information and material about the Council and its policies, the Council's website is critical. It has been re-developed and relaunched and now plays a central role in our communications. It remains a dynamic tool and is updated daily. It recently received very positive feedback from Cornwall Association of Local Councils in terms of the design, legibility, accessibility and content. The Council also has a separate website for the Guildhall.

The Council has been expanding the range of on-line services and the ability for people to report issues, make enquiries about services and book them. There is a need for a review of policy and content for the website and an update is planned this year. There will also be a re-launch of the Guildhall website to align with the re-opening.

Social Media

The Council has an active social media presence with 2,900 facebook followers.
It has 660 followers on Instagram but this is rising at a significant rate (within the last 12 months) and has strong reach. Key services, such as the Cornerstone, the Guildhall and Weddings all have their own pages, followers and reasonable reach on both Facebook and Instagram

It has a presence on Linked In which has a role in engaging with other professional and public sector forums and is used for recruitment. It also has a presence on X (twitter) but is not actively managed.

The Council has its own YouTube channel. This is used for livestreaming and sharing civic events and festivals or issues which have wider interest.

These are important channels for any public body because they are the most effective way to communicate with key parts of the community – they have the widest community reach (but equally, continue to be subject change). So, for example very few young people now have an active presence on Facebook. They use a number of alternative platforms, including TikTok, but Instagram is still dominant.

Council staff are continually developing their skills and now make more dynamic use of social media and on-line platforms, reels stories and livestreaming to facebook and youtube.

The Cornerstone is exploring TikTok and a review of channels and communication for younger age groups will be a priority for the Youth Engagement Officer role.

Print and Local Media
St Ives benefits from a truly local newspaper which works closely with the Council and is an important local communication channel. In addition, it provides the Council with print and other services. The Council also uses St Ives local to communicate and share information about events and services. Print media enables the Council to reach older age groups and the continued role of print media remains valued.

Physical communications
The Council maintains noticeboards in key locations and also makes increasing use of banner signage, including at Council buildings, in public spaces and it prints and uses posters and display boards. This could be further developed through, for example use of frequently visited sites such as public conveniences.

For targeted consultation and engagement, the Council prints postcard and hard copy questionnaire formats, leaflets and flyers.

Design and House-Style
A revised house style was approved some time ago and is being applied in terms of key documents and printed material. There has been significant progress in the roll-out but this is still not complete. Rolling out a consistent house style is important as it enables the Council to develop a stronger identity and communicate with in a single voice.

Livestreaming
The Council has infrastructure to live stream meetings and events, and this will become an important tool to enable a far greater number of people to learn about the Council's work and decision making and will – it is hoped – lead to a greater level of engagement and communication with the community and local partners. The recent annual meeting has been accessed by over 1,000 people via Facebook, a number we could never achieve for a physical meeting.