



## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY**

Adopted 06.09.22 Review due 09.2023

Westgate on Sea Town Council's policy on community engagement is an overarching framework to better coordinate how we consult and engage with our community, to give Westgate on Sea residents more opportunities to have their say on the services the council provides.

This policy builds on good practice which already exists in the town and acknowledges the council's genuine desire to place engagement at the heart of our role in championing the needs of our communities and involving them in decisions that affect them. We are committed to delivering services, policies and strategies that reflect local priorities, requirements and aspirations.

Crucially, it seeks to establish the minimum standards we will follow when developing a consultation and engagement exercise to ensure that the many different "communities" in the town have a voice in the debate around how services are delivered. It acknowledges the need to provide appropriate opportunities for communities to participate at whatever level they wish to influence how services are provided, decision making and policy development.

### **1. Background and What is Community Engagement**

Westgate on Sea Town Council recognises its essential role to work more closely together and with local people to:

- Shape public services according to what local taxpayers really want.
- Work with a greater range of organisations that provide public services in the town and encourage planning and delivery of services
- Provide excellent value for money
- Helping people to establish an improved sense of neighbourhood and more cohesive communities

It sets out:

- Our objectives for community engagement and how these will be achieved
- Our guiding principles for consultation and community engagement

- The key tasks, we as an organisation will undertake to implement our approach to community engagement and consultation

Community Engagement is a term covering many different activities conducted with people who make up our communities. It is about making sure that people can participate and engage in lots of diverse ways to make Westgate on Sea a better place. Community engagement can happen in many ways from Town Meetings, survey polls, questionnaires, events, through to the initiatives, projects and much more.

Community engagement can also take place at a number of various levels from low involvement activity to high involvement activity. For example this can range from providing information to people, to consultation by asking for feedback on a particular service or policy, to participation when decision making is shared and through to empowerment which gives people ownership of the decisions and support to conduct their own activities.

## **2. Our Objectives**

We have set out objectives for what we wish to achieve from engaging and consulting with our communities:

- Strengthen, develop and sustain opportunities for local people and groups to influence what happens in their communities
- Provide opportunities for communities to shape and influence the development and delivery of quality services and policies that reflect local needs and priorities
- Manage and co-ordinate community engagement activities to ensure consistency, quality, participation, compliance and avoid duplication
- Ensure that community engagement activities provide opportunities for participation for all sections of the community, particularly people and groups that are often missed out of community engagement activities
- Listen to communities and feedback to participants about the outcomes of the community consultation and engagement
- Listen and learn from our own and others' experience and share community engagement skills and knowledge of putting the citizen at the heart of decision making

## **3. Our Guiding Principles:**

- **We will follow a consistent approach to planning for community engagement and consultations:** Our consultations will be pre-planned, have a clear purpose and outcome. We will carefully consider the target audience and the methods used to engage them.
- **We will actively seek to bring the voluntary and community sector on**

**board:** With many organisations providing services in Westgate on Sea, this sector has enormous potential for making a consultation work. They can reach parts of the community that we may find hard to reach.

4. **Elected councillors will positively encourage involvement:** Positive encouragement from elected councillors is crucial to the success of a good consultation. They are strategically placed in the community to build relations with residents and are often well-respected.
  - **We will listen and feedback:** Consultation results will be properly analysed and used to inform decisions about how we deliver services. We will feedback overall responses from consultations, the council's subsequent decision (where specific to service) and how the consultation influenced it.
  - **Recording and sharing information with relevant stakeholders:** Information from engagement and consultation will be captured in a structured way that is compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations and this together with summary key messages and outcomes, will be shared with councillors, officers, partners and other audiences as appropriate.

## 5. **Our Partners**

We recognise that the council alone cannot achieve the ambitions set out in this policy. Everyone has a part to play in community engagement and consultation particularly:

- **All residents in Westgate on Sea**
- **Elected councillors, who play a key role in actively encouraging involvement at a very local level**
- **Council staff, everyone participates in community engagement activity in various forms**
- **Community and voluntary sector organisations, who provide local services, work directly with local groups and organisations and with members of usually excluded groups and represent the view of their sectors.**
- **Private sector organisations and providers, by working with other organisations and partnerships to make sure services across the town complement each other.**

We will work with other organisations, such as the police, schools and colleges, health service providers and groups and individuals from the community, voluntary and private sectors to make sure that community engagement activities influence the future direction of the town.

## **5. How will we measure our achievements?**

It is important to understand how we are doing when it comes to evaluating the success of this policy. We will use a variety of methods to measure this, including:

- Through attendance at meetings of the Council, committees, Steering/Working Groups and the Annual Town Meeting
- Responses received to questionnaires, surveys and polls
- Statistics from the website
- Statistics from Facebook and Twitter
- The activity of and interest in the town forums/surgeries

## **6. Want to get involved?**

Westgate on Sea Town Council already engages on a range of issues utilising many different forms of engagement. The purpose of this policy is to introduce a consistent and compliant way in which we plan, develop and share learning from engagement and consultations to influence the way in which we continue to provide services in the future.

For more information on this policy/strategy, or to find out more about becoming involved in putting it into action, please contact Gill Gray, Town Clerk.

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Or visit our website: [www.westgateonsea.gov.uk](http://www.westgateonsea.gov.uk)