

## **STOKENHAM PARISH COUNCIL**

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

#### **Introduction**

Stokenham Parish Council's community engagement activities have been brought together into one overarching strategy for the Parish and, as a result, we are aiming to better coordinate how we engage with all communities within the geographical area of Stokenham parish - based on our belief that:

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

This community engagement strategy recognises the diversity of our community, the importance of community capacity building and the need to provide appropriate opportunities for local people and the community to participate at whatever level they wish to influence service delivery, decision making and policy development.

#### **Stokenham Parish Council's vision**

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

- A parish that protects the outstandingly beautiful environment in which it is situated but is brave enough to embrace the best of what the modern world has to offer.
- A lifestyle that benefits from improving the living standards of its people.
- A community that enjoys a safe, secure and healthy way of life
- A caring community that provides for all its age groups.
- A community that takes every opportunity to help itself.
- In the face of changes to the traditional industries of fishing and agriculture an outward looking community adopting new activities to sustain the economic viability of the area.

It 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 Community Engagement Strategy?**

This Community Engagement Strategy aims to support strong, active and inclusive communities, who are informed and involved in decision-making and enable us to improve public services to enhance quality of life across Stokenham Parish. By this we mean:

- **strong communities**, who can form and sustain their own organisations, bringing people together to deal with their common concerns
- **active communities**, where people are supported to improve quality of life in their own communities
- **inclusive communities**, where all sections of the community 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 Community Engagement Strategy delivers an effective and coordinated approach to community engagement for the benefit of all people and the diverse communities of Stokenham Parish . We will:

- **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 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 people and groups that are often missed out of community engagement activities
- listen to communities and ensure **feedback** to participants about the outcomes of consultation and engagement
- provide **variety and flexibility and choice** in community engagement activities
- 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.

### 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 community engagement activities.

Our priorities include:

- improving **coordination** and governance of community engagement activities, by the development of protocols, toolkits and frameworks that reach out and involve the community as a whole
- developing a **web-based blog resource** to engage consultation with the local community and wider interest community
- 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 are often missed out of community engagement activities

- 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
- participating in **local networks** to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas
- **rolling out** our community engagement strategy through councillors and others involved in community 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 Community Engagement Strategy work, particularly:

- all Stokenham 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
- parish clerk and any staff or volunteers – everyone is involved 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 views of their sectors
- partners, by working with other organisations and partnerships to make sure that services across the city complement each other.

Stokenham Parish Council seeks to work with other organisations, such as the police, universities, health service, and all groups outside and within the parish together with individuals from the community, voluntary and private sectors to make sure that engagement activities influence the future direction of the Parish.

We also know that we need to work with our local and visiting communities to encourage effective community engagement and ensure that processes are flexible and can be tailored to different groups and individuals in different areas of the Parish. 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.

### **What has been achieved so far?**

A parish plan was produced in April 2004 and there have been plenty of changes, challenges and achievements since then. This strategy builds on the many good examples of community engagement activity across the Parish. Some of these are mentioned below.

- **Parish Training.** We have worked with funders to provide First Aid, IT, Country Crafts and a selection of training that has brought people together and provided a conduit for capacity building in all areas.
- **Local Foods.** We have supported local businesses to allow more people to become engaged in local activities and where possible bring people together to

raise awareness of such local provision and share skills, highlight other outlets and forge new relationships

- **Community development.** We actively pursue whatever funds are available to target action on enabling community capacity building and community engagement, with a particular emphasis on promoting equality and diversity and involving communities in plans or changes for their area.
- **Access.** We have worked with landowners, residents and other partners to provide a Permissive Path link between Stokenham and Torcross. This council actively work to assist people to shape how they can connect with other residents, nearby areas, visiting tourists and the wider community to allow everyone easy access and whilst supporting the environment and local economy.
- **Localised working.** In October 2008 we commenced a parish pilot, involving surrounding areas/parishes, to provide a more responsive and localised management and operation of local maintenance services. This was piloted to test bringing services to a local level and ensuring that residents' views on local priorities are heard and fed into how such service responds in the short term, but also into as to how it develops over the medium and long term of such delivery.

### **What do we mean by community engagement?**

Community engagement can mean different things to different people, different communities and different services and situations. We have designed our Community 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 community engagement are:

- **Information** supports all types of community engagement and keeps people informed about such things as decisions, services and local events (e.g. Parish Council newsletter with all local information. The Parish 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. parish plan, questionnaires, newsletter feedback, Council website blog).
- **Attending meetings.** This is when members of the public are welcomed and encouraged to attend any parish council meeting (such dates and times of meetings are posted on the Stokenham Parish Council noticeboard, website or can be obtained from the Clerk – 01548 581185) to put forward their concerns, suggestions or offer assistance within the 'Open Forum' section of the meeting. Or alternatively people can attend the Annual Parish 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 parish council will consider and respond to such.

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 we will seek to involve communities and individual in

much greater depth. Our aim is to work towards devolved decision-making and supporting independent community initiatives wherever possible and to demonstrate where this type of community engagement activity can make genuine improvements to services.

### **What are our community engagement standards?**

#### **In all of our engagement activities we will:**

- **Co-ordination & Partnership**
  - co-ordinate community engagement activities, with the parish council and partners, to avoid duplication and 'consultation fatigue', caused by too much consultation and too little action and feedback
  - provide leadership, to ensure that community engagement influences services and plans.
- **Access & Inclusion**
  - ensure that we take into account particular needs and overcome any difficulties participants may have to enable them 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 community 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 community engagement activity and what it hopes to achieve
  - ensure that community engagement activities are realistic and that expectations are not raised unnecessarily
  - have clear processes to feed back on community 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 community 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 community engagement activities are voluntary, and that participants can withdraw at any time
  - ensure that information obtained from community 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 community engagement
  - engage with key stakeholders and/or representative groups in advance of specific community 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 Community 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 Community Engagement Strategy?**

This strategy supports co-ordinated community 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 Community Engagement Strategy.

- **The Elected Members** will actively work to enhance community engagement activity in council decision-making.
- **The Parish Clerk** is responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the strategy.