

# LYTCHETT MINSTER AND UPTON TOWN COUNCIL

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

### 1. Introduction

1.1 This document forms the Council's Community Engagement Strategy. It sets out:

- The role of community engagement and its importance.
- How Lytchett Minster and Upton Town Council engages the wider community and identifies the needs and aspirations of the community.
- How the Council can improve community engagement.

1.2 The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Encourage effective local community engagement.
- Ensure that embedded throughout the Council there is a clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions which affect them.
- Enable the aspirations/comments/suggestions etc obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way in which services are being delivered.
- Identify how the Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to hard to reach groups).

### 2 The Council's Commitment to Community Engagement

2.1 Lytchett Minster and Upton Town Council is committed to providing a democratic representational voice for the people of Lytchett Minster and Upton, central to this ethos is engagement with the local community in a proactive and meaningful way.

### 3 Community Engagement – an overview

3.1 Community engagement is concerned with giving local people a voice and involving them in decisions which affect them and their community. This may include individuals, voluntary and community organisations as well as other public sector bodies.

It provides an opportunity for local people to talk to the Council about their aspirations and/or needs in their community and neighbourhood. It allows the Council to consult with and inform people about what services it provides, how its priorities and policies are determined and how well it is performing.

- 3.2 Consultation forms an integral part of community engagement and can be defined as:

“The act of consulting or a conference for discussion or the seeking of advice”.  
(Collins, 1995)

Without consultation, addressing a particular need is a hit and miss affair as there is no way of establishing what is required to address the problem.

There are a wide range of consultation methods such as surveys, neighbourhood meetings, questionnaires, public enquiries and planning for real exercises.

- 3.3 The term ‘stakeholder’ makes reference to a wide range of people and groups (these might include residents, visitors, businesses, government, voluntary organisations, public service organisations etc) all of which have an interest in the Council’s services and projects.

‘Hard to reach groups’ refers to those who experience social exclusion and are sometimes perceived as being disempowered. Some examples include young people, elderly people or those with physical disability, language, financial constraints, cultural differences or social expectations. Sometimes organisations do not put enough effort into seeking their views, but it is important to note that sometimes they have excluded themselves through personal choice.

- 3.4 The key aspects of community engagement include:
- Development of a network of relationships between the Council, individuals, voluntary and community groups.
  - Clear and open communication to ensure that information is made accessible to all groups.
  - Listening and understanding to a range of people to identify aspirations, needs and problems of local people and groups.

- 3.5 Effective and meaningful community engagement can provide a number of benefits:
- The problems and needs of local people are clearly identified in order that appropriate new or improved facilities/services can be provided.
  - Those participating feel empowered by being involved in decision making in their local community and a sense of ownership and pride in the new facilities/indicatives.
  - It may result in a renewed respect for the Council; enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections or for standing in Council.

#### **4. Lytchett Minster and Upton and Community Engagement**

- 4.1 The Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following ways:
- Allocation of a 'Public Representation' session during each meeting of Full Council. This provides an opportunity for local residents to make representations to the Council or ask questions in relating to items on the agenda.
  - Allocation of a 'Public Representation' session during each Committee meeting. This provides an opportunity for local residents to make representations or ask questions relating to items on the agenda.
  - Publishing contact details of all Council members and officers on the website and Town notice boards.
  - Production of regular newsletters highlighting local issues and latest developments within the Council and wider community (available on noticeboard and website).
  - Ensuring that agendas and minutes of Committee meetings are available on the website or copies available upon request. Agendas also available on Town Centre noticeboards and Library.
  - Annual report and statement of accounts available from Town Council Help Centre upon request.
  - Involvement in partnerships with other authorities to provide improved community amenity areas, e.g. Hop Close Open Space (Purbeck District Council).
  - Consultation exercises with local residents (and their children) regarding the provision of play equipment (Big Lottery Bid for improved facilities at the Recreation Ground/Warbler Close) (2011 Residents' Survey to 4000 households).
  - User surveys have been used to seek public opinion of Council facilities and services through questionnaire based research (Davenport Close Play Area).
  - Councillor's presence at 'Street Corner' meetings to meet with residents at a time and place convenient to them.
  - The Council has an office conveniently located in the town centre and open from 09.00 am until 12.30 pm Monday to Thursday.
  - In addition the Council has a Meeting Room/Chamber which are used by an array of different organisations and groups – which enables easy access to possible 'focus groups', if required for consultation exercises.

Unlike other tiers of local government, Town Councillors always live within the town they serve and have close ties to their constituents and local voluntary and community organisations on a day-to-day basis, making them uniquely placed in terms of informed representation.

## **5. Communication**

5.1 Lytchett Minster and Upton Town Council is committed to improving community engagement by:

- Continuing all the above activities and services into the future and improving relationships with community groups including developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement facilities.
- Ensuring that any information published is clear, concise and widely available.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups, as and when the need arises.
- Participating in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas.
- Publicizing the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other community groups; in order to encourage new relationships/partnerships to be formed and raise community spirit.
- Ensure that appropriate evaluation is carried out following consultation exercises to ensure that lessons learned are carried forward and an assessment of how effective/useful the consultation was.
- There are a wide range of consultation methods such as surveys, neighborhood meetings, questionnaires, public enquiries and planning for real exercises.

## **6 Linking with other Council Policies**

6.1 This strategy is cross-cutting affecting many, if not all, of the Council's policies, including:

- equality and diversity – integral to good governance, leadership and appreciation of the diversity in our community
- A Community Engagement Strategy is a requirement for the achievement of Quality Council Status.
- 

## **7 Review**

7.1 This strategy will be reviewed annually and amended as necessary based on good practice or evidence taken forward.

## **8 Conclusion**

8.1 The adoption of a Community Engagement Strategy will assist in improving communication between the Council and the wider community. This will enable the Council to better understand the needs and aspirations of local residents/groups, and in turn, facilitate appropriate projects to meet those needs and create an enhanced community spirit.

**June 2011**