COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

A. WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community engagement is the process through which the community is informed about and/or invited to contribute to proposals or policy changes relating to Cranbrook Town Council's responsibilities and services.

Community engagement is also about providing opportunities for people to have a say in reviewing, designing, influencing or commenting on the decisions, activities and services in Cranbrook, while being clear that the Council is not always the statutory decision maker and cannot involve all residents.

B. WHO DO WE ENGAGE?

We will seek the views of anyone appearing to have an interest in any area in which we carry out a role or task, including:

1. local residents
2. service users, and people who might become service users
3. groups representing the public
4. elected representatives such as Councillors and MPs
5. local businesses
6. voluntary and charitable organisations
7. our staff
8. other public authorities and service providers

We recognise that when seeking views, some individuals or communities may be harder to reach than others.

C. AIMS

We want Cranbrook Town Council to be a modern organisation which strives to be open to all, transparent and responsive. We pride ourselves in working with and for aforementioned stakeholders in order to help create a place where everyone feels part of a strong, prosperous and vibrant community. We want Cranbrook to be a safe, clean and green environment where everyone is proud to live and bring up their families.

The aim of this set of strategy is to ensure that Cranbrook Town Council sets clear and specific standards for community engagement in order to:

1. Improve the community's understanding of how the Town Council operates.
2. Inform residents of the roles of the Town Council and its Councillors.
3. Enhance transparency and accountability of the Town Council.
4. Identify the needs of local residents, service users, community groups and local businesses and take action to meet those needs.
5. Promote opportunities for local residents, service users, community groups and local businesses to provide their opinions and get involved.
6. Improve experience of involvement of local residents, service users, community groups and local businesses and give them the power and confidence to be part of the solution to community problems and issues.
7. Encourage effective local community engagement.
8. Enable the aspirations / comments / suggestions etc obtained from the community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way in which services are being delivered.
9. Improve plan and shape the future of the town according to local needs and priorities.

D. HOW DO WE ENGAGE?

1. Communication
    i. Publish email addresses for all Council members and officers on the website.
    ii. Council office opens from 10:00am to 2:00pm from Monday to Friday and outside of those times by appointment.
    iii. Public participation at Council and Committee Meetings. This provides an opportunity for local residents to make representations to the Council or ask questions relating to Council business.
    iv. Publish agendas and minutes of Council and Committee Meetings.
    v. Publish the annual report, financial and audit documents.
    vi. Publish local information, local events and latest development on Council websites and social media platforms, which are updated on a regular basis.
    vii. Distribute press releases of Council events and campaigns and publish on the Council website.

        viii.   Answer public enquiries timely and professionally via the Council office telephone, email, social media inbox and via walk-in at the Council office reception.

2. Partnership
   i. Partner with other authorities and community groups to provide improved facilities and services and enhance the town.
   ii. Some members and officers act as representatives for Outside Bodies such as community groups, local organisations, and other government agencies, and regularly attend their meetings. Representatives report back to Council meetings.

3. Support
   i. Work closely with, and in support of, our town schools, and finding opportunities to engage with the students.
   ii. Work closely with, and in support of, our town community groups.
   iii. Support local projects and organisations and assist them in meeting their own aims and objectives.

4. Consultation
   i. Participate in town and community events which provide opportunities for the public to meet the Councillors.
   ii. Carry out consultation exercises with local residents to make their needs heard.
   iii. Collect views of hirers of the Town Council facilities and amenities when they use the facilities and amenities.
   iv. Councillors have close ties to their constituents and local voluntary and community organisations on a day-to-day basis. This makes them uniquely placed in terms of informed representation.
   v. Use focus groups where appropriate and/or identify aforementioned stakeholders with specific skills who can be consulted on specialist subjects.

F. Future Outlook

With the Town Council's vision and community engagement aims stated in section C, Cranbrook Town Council is committed to evolving as a modern, inclusive, and transparent organisation. Looking ahead, we aim to build on the foundations laid out in this strategy by:

1. Ensuring inclusivity - continuing to identify and address barriers to engagement to ensure stakeholders within the community feel empowered to contribute.
2. Adapting to changing needs - regularly reviewing and updating this strategy to reflect the evolving priorities of Cranbrook's residents, ensuring that the Council remains responsive and effective.
3. Sustainable growth - supporting initiatives that align with Cranbrook's vision of being a safe, clean, and green environment, while balancing the needs of a growing and diverse population.

4. Stronger partnerships - deepening collaborations with stakeholders to maximise resources and achieve shared goals for the community's prosperity.
5. Evaluation - using feedback to refine and improve strategies over time.