

Why do we need a community engagement strategy?

- Our communities have a central role to play in influencing and shaping what happens in South Hams. We recognise that our role as a local authority is changing, and we're committed to helping people to do more for themselves, for each other and for their community.
- In adopting a community engagement strategy it is our aim to not only reach out to community but to ensure it has a sense of ownership over the future policies and actions of its district council.

If you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far, go together (African Proverb)

What do we mean by Communities and Community Engagement?

Community Engagement is a planned process, which has the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by place, interest or identity, to encourage them to actively take part in making decisions about their community and empower them to take leadership on matters of local need



‘Communities of Place’ where people identify with a defined geographical area ranging from the whole District, a town, a parish, a hamlet, a street or estate

‘Communities of Identity’ as defined by those people, such as ethnic groups, people who share a particular experience, interest or stake in an issue, or characteristics such as young people, older people, disabled people, ethnic groups, or lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

‘Communities of Interest’ where people share a particular experience or interest, which might include tenants and resident groups, parking permit holders, people involved in environmental projects, or people who come together to use services such as parks, green spaces, or community buildings.

What are the aims and benefits of effective community engagement?

Benefit	Aims
Better communication and understanding	Community more aware of the Council's initiatives and the reason for their introduction,
Improving the relationship between the community and the Council	Build trust through the effective use of the Community Engagement Strategy
Policy and Practice that reflects the views of the community	Community, by its involvement, shows its enthusiasm for the actions on which it has been consulted
Increase customer satisfaction and sense of ownership of service provision	Enthusiastic support from community for policies on which they have been consulted
Increased transparency and accountability	Our communities feel that we communicate honestly and openly with them, giving them a greater understanding of the reasons for the Councils decisions and actions
Encouraging connections to develop within the community	Communities working together in consultations bring about a cohesiveness

Why is community engagement important?

We are in challenging times and so it is more important than ever that we keep our communities informed and listen to their ideas. Through effective community engagement;

- Residents will have a better understanding and trust in the work of the council and the decisions we make
- Residents will play a greater part in decision making
- The relationship between the council and residents is mutual, instead of residents being passive recipients
- Community members and groups are involved in work to support their area
- We have greater numbers of people interested in the change we need to make, and willing to help us shape that change
- Innovation and change takes place through diverse networks and community action

Our approach to community engagement

- **Planning** – We will be clear on the purpose for the engagement which is based on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions
- **Inclusion** – we will identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement
- **Methods** – we will use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose (see the levels of community involvement below)
- **Support** – We will identify and overcome barriers to participation
- **Communication** – We will communicate clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement
- **Impact** – We will assess the impact of the engagement and use what has been learned to improve our future community engagement
- **Empowerment** – We will endeavour to empower our communities to take leaderships roles where appropriate

What are the different levels of participation?

Increasing levels of community involvement					
	Informing	Consulting	Involving	Collaborating	Empowering
Aim	By providing Information that people need to know, we are ensuring we are transparent	Capture residents views on issues	To have a more in-depth form of consultation where we invite communities to test Council procedures and processes	To work alongside the community, giving equal power in the decision making process	Promoting community leadership. Encouraging, and supporting where possible, our residents to take the lead on initiatives.
The Intention	That our communities know what is happening within the Council and are aware of any information that relates to them	To provide adequate opportunity for the community to inform us of their views within our decision making process. We will communicate clearly as to where the ultimate decision making power rests. We will provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision making.	Through involving Members of the public we have policies and procedures that are effective and represent the needs of the communities	To increase the communities ownership and engagement in formulating solutions, innovations or improvements through working together.	To support communities to take responsibility in designing and delivering local innovation
Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social media / online - Face to face local meetings - Newsletters - Papers - Exhibitions - Roadshows - Factsheets - Websites - Public notices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engagement portal - Residents panel - Service user panels - Community Clusters - Consultation survey - Residents Panel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - End-User testing - Community boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-production - Residents Panel - User involvement in decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parish Plans - Participatory budgeting - User led commissioning - Referendums

The principles we'll apply to our engagement with you

- **Trustworthiness** – we should aim to build trust with the community by communicating clearly, honestly and transparently through:
 - Being clear with you what our intentions of the engagement are
 - Being upfront about how much influence your engagement will have
 - Reporting back on the results of the engagement so that you know what impact your input has had
- **Openness** – We should be open to new ideas and keep our communities informed about what is happening at the Council.
 - Tell you about the work of the Council and the challenges faced
 - Encourage and listen to ideas about how we can do things differently
- **Inclusivity** – We should understand that innovation, vision, and creativity are born of diversity. We should try to consult and engage with a diverse range of people; especially including those who are often marginalised.
 - We will identify and develop plans to reach our hard to reach groups so that your voice can be heard
- **Collaboration**– We see that our community is facing many issues that no one group or sector can address. In our engagement, we should find ways of bringing people together to regenerate the community, and to build resilience for our district, found in the connections between people.
- **Learning and evolving** - We will learn from the feedback we receive through our engagement to ensure that we continuously evolve

Outcomes

KNOWLEDGE

The Collective knowledge of our communities helps to shape ideas that make South Hams a great place to live, work and visit

AWARENESS

Local People in our communities are aware of how and when they can get involved

INFLUENCE

Our communities influence issues that affect their communities and are involved in improving their local area

FEEDBACK

The Council learns and evolves based on the engagement we undertake. Communities participating in engagement understand how their views have made a difference

SUPPORT

Councilors and Officers are supported to involve communities effectively in everything we do

EMPOWER

Our community is empowered to meet both current and future challenges