



### *Sheviock Parish Council*

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## **Sheviock Parish 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 Sheviock Parish 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 within 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 Sheviock Parish Council is committed in its Objectives to provide a democratic representational voice for the people of the Parish of Sheviock. Central to this 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. 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 a 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/initiatives.
  - It may result in a renewed respect for the Council; enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections or for standing for Council.

#### **4. SheviocK Parish Council and Community Engagement**

- 4.1 The Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following ways:
- Allocation of a 'Public Participation' session at all Parish Council Meetings. This provides an opportunity for local residents to make representations to the Council or ask questions relating to items on the agenda.
  - Publishing contact details of all Council members and officers on the website.
  - Production of a regular newsletter highlighting local organisations and latest developments within the Council. (available on the website)
  - Ensuring that agendas and minutes of meetings are available on the website or copies available on request.
  - Ensuring that the Annual Report and Statement Accounts are available on the website.
  - Involvement in partnerships with the Unitary Authority to provide improved services e.g. Local Maintenance Partnership for the maintenance of Public Footpaths.
  - Advertises and promotes Local Democracy, Councillor Vacancies and elections through Councils web site, local newspapers, the Parish Council Newsletter and notice boards encouraging residents to become involved in local democracy.
  - Surveys to seek public opinion on local issues (Traffic/parking).
  - Holding Councillor Surgeries – These allow residents to be represented at a local level.
  - Council press releases are featured in local newspapers to keep the general public informed on events, projects and other items as necessary.
  - The Council has an office conveniently located in Craffhole and is open on Tuesdays and Fridays from 11:15 until 2:45.pm and Fridays (please see

website/and office door for school holiday alternative times. All call office 01503 232996 to hear times on answer machine message.

Unlike other tiers of local government, Parish Councillors always live within the area they serve and have close ties to their residents 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 Sheviock Parish 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 activities.
  - 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 and to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas.
  - Publishing 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.
  - Ensuring 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.

## 6. **Review**

- 6.1 This strategy will be reviewed at regular intervals and amended as necessary based on good practice or evidence taken forward.

## 7. **Conclusion**

- 7.1 The adoption of a Community Engagement Strategy will assist in improving communications 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.