

KESGRAVE TOWN COUNCIL

Community Engagement Strategy 2021-23



1. Introduction

1.1 This document sets out:

- The role of community engagement and its importance;
- How Council engages with the wider community and identifies the needs and aspirations of the community;
- How Council can improve community engagement.

1.2 The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Encourage effective local community engagement;
- Ensure that throughout Council, and embedded within its culture, there is a clear understanding of the need to engage with the local community and residents, about decisions which affect them;
- Enable aspirations, comments, suggestions and feedback via community engagement to have an impact on decision-making and the way in which Council's services and activities are delivered and developed;
- Identify how Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community, including harder to reach groups.

2. Council's Commitment to Community Engagement

2.1 Council is committed in its vision and key corporate objectives to provide an open, fair and democratic representational "voice" for the people of Kesgrave. Central to Council's ethos is engagement with the local community in a proactive, genuine, fair, open, transparent and meaningful way.

3. Community Engagement – an overview

3.1 Community engagement is concerned with giving people "a voice" and involving them in decisions which affect them and the community. This may be individuals, volunteers, community groups, clubs and organisations, local businesses, together with other public sector bodies and stakeholder partners, for example East Suffolk Council, Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Constabulary. Community engagement provides an opportunity for local people to talk more openly to Council about their aspirations and/or needs in their community and neighbourhood. It allows Council to consult more fully and inform local people about what services and activities 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. Without consultation, a particular need may not be fully addressed or dealt with. Council uses a wide range of consultation methods such as the questionnaires employed as part of the [Kesgrave Neighbourhood Plan](#) process, drop-in sessions, meetings, community engagement days and updates in local community magazines, Council's website, website response forms and blogs, open forums for the public at all full Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings, its social media outlets, also via the [Kesgrave Community](#) website and the local press and media.

3.3 The term "stakeholder" refers to a wide range of people and groups, which includes residents, visitors, volunteers, voluntary organisations, local businesses, the District and

County Councils, the Police, local schools and all who have an interest in Council's services, activities and projects. Harder to reach groups may mean young people, elderly people, or those with physical disability, language or financial constraints, cultural differences and those with limited access to public transport, private transport or online services. For those with vision and sight problems, Council will print larger font documents of at least font size 14, upon request. Council is committed to making every effort to seek the views of these harder reach groups of people, including those who simply prefer not to get involved.

3.4 The key aspects of community engagement include:

- Development of a network of relationships between Council, individuals, voluntary and community groups, businesses, clubs and organisations;
- Clear, open, fair and transparent communication to ensure that information is made accessible to all groups; and
- 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 and understood so that appropriate new or improved facilities and services can be considered;
- Those participating should feel empowered by being involved in decision-making in their local community and a sense of ownership and pride in the new facilities or initiatives; and
- It may result in a renewed respect for Council, enhancing leadership and greater interest in elections or in standing for Council and raise the Council's profile and reputation in the community.

4. Facilitating Community Engagement

4.1 Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following ways:

- Allocation of Public Representation sessions at the beginning of all Council meetings which allow residents, organisations and businesses to speak to Council or ask questions relating to items on the agenda;
- Publication of contact details of all Council members and officers on its website and Council notice boards;
- Updates on its website, the [Kesgrave Community](#) website, via social media outlets, in local community newsletters and via the local press about local events and the latest developments within Council and the wider community;
- Ensuring that agendas are published on noticeboards to meet legal requirements along with making sure that agendas and minutes of all meetings are available on Council's website. Details are also displayed on the electronic screens at every meeting for the public to see and in addition, copies are available at meetings and generally, upon request;
- Council uploads the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts onto its website;
- Consultation exercises with local residents, organisations and businesses including children and young people, regarding the provision of play equipment and other Council projects. Council has also had a Play Area and Open Spaces Sub-Committee where local residents were encouraged to participate in order to express their respective aspirations for play equipment and to assist in decision-making about upgrading existing facilities or installing new equipment (this can be reinstated if there is sufficient resident interest);
- Council also encourages discussion on issues related to highways and bus services via participation in a Transport and Pedestrian Sub-committee;
- The extensive Neighbourhood Plan consultation process sought resident opinion and tested draft objectives concerning planning issues and Kesgrave facilities and services;

- Members of the public have been invited to the various engagement sessions/surgeries around town, at varying days, times and locations in order that peoples' views can be represented at a local level;
- Council press releases are featured in local newspapers to keep the general public in town, the district and the county informed of community events, Council projects and other newsworthy items;
- Council enjoys good relationships with children, young people, teaching staff and parents involved with the local schools and through the Council's youth provision, working and engaging with Headteachers and key school personnel, and generally engaging and seeking the views and opinions of this sector of the community;
- Council frequently enjoins with community stakeholder groups, for example, SALC (Suffolk Association of Local Councils - affiliated to the National Association of Local Councils), East Suffolk Council, Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Constabulary;
- Council has offices conveniently located with ample car-parking and cycle-racks, where its small part-time officer team are available each weekday apart from Thursdays; and
- As councillors live in, or close to, town Council has close ties with the area that it serves, its constituents, and local voluntary and community organisations on a day-to-day basis, making Councillors at this tier of local government, uniquely placed in terms of informed representation.
- In addition, Council engages with surrounding Parish/Town and Tier 2 councils (East Suffolk and Suffolk County) on areas of mutual interest and to enable us to learn lessons from others.

5. Communication

5.1 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 development 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 including in appropriate formats for people with visual impairments, learning disabilities, poor literacy or people who require language translation.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups, as and when the need arises;
- Continuing with the website announcements to engage and consult with the community and wider interests;
- Participating in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas;
- Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between Council and other community groups, in order to encourage new relationships/partnerships to be formed and raise community spirit; and
- 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. Linking with other Council Policies

6.1 This strategy coordinates with other key Council policies, strategies, procedures and its Business Plan, including:

- Equality and Diversity Policy integral to good governance, leadership and appreciation of the diversity in our community; and
- A community engagement strategy is a requirement of the accreditation of Quality Council Status, which Council strives to achieve and then maintain.

7. Review

- 7.1 This strategy will be reviewed bi-annually and amended as necessary, based on good practice, legislation or evidence taken forward, and as agreed by Council.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The adoption of a community engagement strategy will assist in improving communication between Council and the wider community. This will enable Council to better understand the needs and aspirations of local residents and community groups, and in turn, facilitate appropriate projects to meet these needs, and create an enhanced community spirit and culture.

9. Alternative Formats

- 9.1 In accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, copies of this document in large print (in excess of font 14 or higher), in A3 format if required, can be made available to those with sight impairment upon request from the Town Council offices by telephoning 01473 625179 or by emailing enquiry@kesgravetowncouncil.org.uk

10. Freedom of Information

- 10.1 In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this document is available on the Town Council's website www.kesgravetowncouncil.org.uk and copies are available for inspection at the Town Council's offices.
- 10.2 Please also refer to the Town Council's Publication Scheme, also on its website.

Strategy effective from: 26 June 2023

Date for next review: 26 June 2025