

# Kesgrave Town Council

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2018-2020



### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Kesgrave Town Council's Community Engagement Strategy sets out:**

- The role of the Community Engagement and its importance;
- How Kesgrave Town Council engages with 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 throughout the 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 the Town Council's services and activities are being delivered;
- Identify how the Town Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community, including harder to reach groups.

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

2.1 Kesgrave Town 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 the Town 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 Suffolk Coastal District Council, Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Constabulary. Community Engagement provides an opportunity for local people to talk more openly to the Town Council about their aspirations and/or needs in their community and neighbourhood. It allows the Town 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.

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3.2 Consultation forms an integral part of Community Engagement. Without consultation, addressing a particular need may not be fully addressed or dealt with. The Town Council uses a wide range of consultation methods such as the questionnaire/s as part of the Kesgrave Neighbourhood Plan process, meetings, community engagement sessions and surgeries at differing days, times and venues around the Town, updates in local community magazines, updates on the Town Council's website, website response forms and blogs, open forums for the public at all full Town Council, Committee and Sub-Committee Meetings, its Facebook and Twitter feeds, also via the Town Guide website and the local press and media;

3.3 The term "stakeholder" makes reference to a wide range of people and groups, which may include residents, visitors, volunteers, voluntary organisations, local businesses, the District and County Councils, the Police, local schools and all who have an interest in the Town Council's services, activities and projects. Harder to reach groups may mean young people, elderly people, or those with physical disability, language, financial constraints, cultural differences and those with limited access to public transport, private transport or online services. For those with vision and sight problems, the Town Council will print larger font documents of at least font size 14, upon request. The Town Council is committed to expending every effort into seeking the views of the 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 the Town Council, individuals, voluntary and community groups, clubs and organisations;
- Clear, open, fair and transparent 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 and services can be provided;
- 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;
- It may result in a renewed respect for the Town Council, enhancing leadership and greater interest in elections or for standing for Council and raise the Council's profile and reputation in the community.

#### **4. Kesgrave Town Council and Community Engagement**

4.1 The Town Council currently facilitates Community Engagement in the following ways:

- Allocation of Public Representation sessions at the beginning of each full Town Council Meeting, Committee or Sub-Committee Meetings.

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- This provides an opportunity for local residents to make representations to the Town Council or ask questions relating to items on the agenda;
- Publishing contact details of all Council members and officers on its website;
- Updates on its website, town guide website, social media (Facebook and Twitter feeds), in local community newsletters and via the local press about local events and the latest developments within the Town Council and the wider community;
- Ensuring that agendas and minutes of all meetings are available on the 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;
- The Council uploads the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts on its website;
- Consultation exercises with local residents, including children and young people, regarding the provision of play equipment (and other Town Council projects), have been, and will continue to be undertaken. The Council also has a Play Area and Open Spaces Sub-Committee, where local residents are welcome and indeed encouraged, to become members of this Sub-Committee in order to express their respective aspirations for play equipment and to assist in decision-making about upgrading existing facilities or installing new equipment;
- The Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire/user survey has been utilised to seek the opinion of local residents about the Town Council's facilities and services through the questionnaire based research and analysis work;
- Members of the public have been invited to the various engagement sessions/surgeries around the Town, at varying days, times and locations in order that peoples' views can be represented at a local level;
- Town Council press releases are featured in local newspapers to keep the general public in the Town, the district and the county informed of community events, Town Council projects and other newsworthy items;
- The Town Council enjoys good relationships with children, young people teaching staff and parents involved with the local schools and through the Town Council's Youth Club, where it is involved with attending school assemblies, and generally engaging and seeking the views and opinions of this sector of the local community;
- The Town Council frequently joins community stakeholder groups and meetings. For example, SALC (Suffolk Association of Local Councils), (affiliated to NALC – National Association of Local Councils), Suffolk Coastal District Council, Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Constabulary;
- The Town Council has offices which are conveniently located with ample car-parking and cycle-racks, where its small part-time officer team are available each weekday apart from Thursdays;

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- As Town Councillors live in the Town (or in the case currently of two Councillors within a 3 miles radius from Kesgrave), the 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 Town Councillors at this tier of local government, uniquely placed in terms of informed representation.

### **5. Communication**

#### **5.1 Kesgrave 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 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. (This includes making information available 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 comments and blog resource to engage consultation with the local community and wider interested community;
- 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 the Town 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. Linking with other Town Council Policies**

#### **6.1 This strategy is linked and “joined-up” with most of the Town Council’s policies, strategies, procedures and its Business Plan, including:**

- Equality and diversity is integral to good governance, leadership and appreciation of the diversity in our community;
- A Community Engagement Strategy is a requirement of the accreditation of Quality Council Status, which the Town Council strives to achieve and then maintain.

### **7. Review**

- 7.1 This strategy will be reviewed regularly, (not less than bi-annually) and amended as necessary, based on good practice, legislation or evidence taken forward, and as agreed by the Town Council.

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#### **8. Conclusion**

8.1 The adoption of a Community Engagement Strategy will assist in improving communication between the Town Council and the wider community. This will enable the Town 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 [townclerk@kesgravetowncouncil.org.uk](mailto:townclerk@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](http://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.

*For consideration by the Finance and Governance Committee on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2018 and adoption by the full Town Council on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2018.*

**Policy Approved:** Resolved by full Town Council on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

**Reviewed Body:** Recommendation of Finance and Governance Committee to full Town Council.

**Review Period:** At least bi-annually.

**Next Review:** May 2019.