

# BINGLEY TOWN COUNCIL



Bingley Town Council, Myrtle Place, Bingley, BD16 2LF

## Community Engagement Policy

**Date of adoption: 28<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

**Next review date: May 2026**

### 1. Introduction

This document forms the Town Council's first Community Engagement Policy.

It sets out:

- The Role of community engagement and its importance.
- How Bingley Town Council engages the wider community and identifies the needs aspirations of the community.
- How the Town Council can improve community engagement.

The objectives of the policy are to:

- Encourage effective local community engagement.
- Ensure that embedded throughout the Council there is clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions that affect them.
- Enable aspirations/comments/suggestions obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way 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. Community Engagement – An Overview

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 opportunity for local people to talk to the Council about their aspirations and/or needs in their community and neighbourhood. It allows the Council to consult with and inform people about what services it provides, how it prioritises, how policies are determined and how well it is performing.

The term stakeholder makes reference to a wide range of people and groups (these might include residents, visitors, businesses, government, voluntary organisations and public service organisations), all of which have an interest in the Council's services and projects.

Hard to reach groups refers to those likely to experience social exclusion and are sometimes perceived as being disempowered. Some examples include young people, elderly people, and those with physical disability, language barriers, financial constraints, cultural differences or social expectations. The Council will put effort into seeking their views, but it also recognises that sometimes they have excluded themselves through personal choice.

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 from a range of people to identify aspirations, needs and problems of local people and groups.

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.
- This may result in enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections and standing for Council.

### **3. Bingley Town Council and Community Engagement**

The Town Council will facilitate community engagement in the following ways:

- Making information on what decisions are being considered and how residents can influence or contribute to the discussions in good time.
- Methods used to ensure engagement will be through the Council's website, notice boards, Facebook and Twitter accounts, posters, consultations, reports and word of mouth.
- All meetings of the Council and its committees are open to the public and press and there is a period set aside for residents to speak.
- Residents can access agendas for meetings via the Council website and notice boards.
- The Council's website and agendas explain the procedure for residents wishing to speak at meetings.
- Planning applications are considered at Planning Committee meetings held monthly. The opportunities for people to speak applies equally to these agenda items. Equal opportunity is given to applicants/supporters, objectors and local community groups.
- The Council will produce a list of annual Full Council and committee dates to include the start times of the meetings.
- The Council will be open and accountable in its dealing with residents and the community. It will make information on its policies and procedures freely available on the website.
- The Council will be receptive to requests from residents or communities and will attempt to be flexible in order to ensure their opinions are known not only to the

Council but also to other organisations. This may involve being included as an item for discussion on an agenda.

- Town councillors will continue to represent the Council on various outside bodies, to ensure that they are kept informed of the communities' needs.

#### **4. Communication**

Bingley Town Council is committed to improving community engagement by:

- Continuing all the above activities 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.
- Being proactive and willing to consider any reasonable opportunities that support its purpose of getting information available and increasing contributions from the community, especially those difficult to reach.
- When dealing with controversial issues that affect a particular community then consideration will be given to holding a public meeting.
- Consultations and surveys are to be considered when necessary and appropriate and results will be made available.
- Continuing to work in partnership to produce and review community led policies such as Bingley Neighbourhood Plan.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups when the need arises.
- Publicising 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 to raise community spirit.
- Promoting elections and the importance of the democratic process and the value of being a councillor.
- Promoting the value to the town of volunteering.
- Reviewing the Community Engagement Strategy on an annual basis to ensure that it remains relevant.

#### **5. Freedom of Information**

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this document will be posted on the Council website and copies will be available from the Council office.

#### **6. Outcomes**

The outcomes for which we are striving and against which the success of this policy will be measured are:

- Improved communication through the establishment of new channels of engagement.
- More residents understanding the role of Councillors.