



Bovey Tracey Town Council

Communication & Engagement Strategy

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Change History		
Version	Date	Reason for Change
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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Bovey Tracey Town Council has been democratically elected to represent its electorate in Bovey and Heathfield in all matters appertaining to the powers and responsibilities of a third-tier local authority.
- 1.2 The Council has developed a Communication and Engagement Strategy with the aim of setting a standard for Communication and Engagement with its community.
- 1.3. The Council recognises that the services it provides must reflect the needs of residents and the locality. As a Council, it wants to ensure that communication is two-way; by informing people about the Council and by listening to what people say about the services they would like to see.
- 1.4. A timely two-way flow of information is key to gaining the support of the local community by helping make the council aware of issues that need addressing and putting it in a better position to respond positively to them. Effective engagement is clearly key to supporting how the Town Council achieves its aim is to build a stronger relationship with residents that has community involvement at its heart.
- 1.5 The strategy sets out ways in which the Council seeks to update and modernise its processes and means of communication in order to make it easier to achieve the objectives set out below.

2. Aims and Objectives

- 2.1. The Town Council will ensure that it communicates with residents and stakeholders in a timely and effective manner, and to inform and consult them about matters which affect them
- 2.2. The aim of this strategy is to define clearly the way in which the Council currently engages and consults with its residents, stakeholders and partners on important issues and how it proposes to engage in future through five key principles of:
 - a) **Inform** - provide balanced and objective information in a timely fashion
 - b) **Consult** - actively seek community views, input and feedback
 - c) **Involve** - work with the community so that concerns and aspirations are understood
 - d) **Collaborate** – where appropriate work with the community to identify solutions

e) **Empower** – where appropriate enable participation in decision making

- 2.3. To enable the local community to become more aware of how the Town Council works, to feel able to contribute and understand what can and cannot be done at a local level
- 2.4. To promote community interest and engagement through active participation where the opportunity exists
- 2.5. To include and encourage volunteers and local people with specialist knowledge or skills to take part in Working Groups (or similar), to aid in the collection and analysis of information, and to work up ideas into creative projects, policies and solutions
- 2.6. To use a variety of accessible communication methods to ensure that the way we communicate keeps everyone included
- 2.7. To build trust by being open and transparent
- 2.8. To carry out meaningful consultation as appropriate and feedback the findings to residents and stakeholders in a timely manner
- 2.9. The key stakeholders with which the Council will communicate include:
 - Residents
 - Town, District and County Councillors
 - Devon County Council
 - Teignbridge District Council
 - Dartmoor National Park
 - Community and Voluntary Groups
 - Harder to Reach Groups, such as older people and youth groups
 - Parish Organisations, including sporting & charitable organisations
 - Business Community
 - The Local Press
 - Landowners
 - Primary Schools
 - The Public Sector, Police, Fire, Health
- 2.10. The broader stakeholder community also includes:
 - Potential Developers
 - Transport Providers
 - Housing Providers
 - Visitors
 - Neighbouring Town and Parish Councils
 - The Local Member of Parliament

3. Roles Within the Parish Council

3.1. The Role of Town Councillors

Each Town Councillor has a duty to represent, without bias, the interests of the whole of the community. They are governed by the Code of Conduct which encourages open, informed, timely and courteous communication at all times. They will always try and do their best and are available to help with regard to matters relating to the Parish of Bovey Tracey. They may be contacted by phone or email and contacts are displayed on the Town website and newsletter. A Town Councillor cannot, and must not, make any promises to the public about any matter that is raised with them, other than to advise that the matter will be investigated or considered. This will be done by referring the issue to the Town Clerk, requesting a motion/discussion on the Town Council/Committee agenda as appropriate, or, after guidance from the Clerk, investigate the matter personally. Wherever possible, Town Councillors should ask the originator of the request to place this in writing – email or hard copy. Whilst not mandated, this is strongly recommended to ensure, wherever possible, the existence of an audit trail of incoming requests.

3.2. The Role of the Town Clerk

The Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk are responsible for carrying out the wishes of the Council as a body, and to manage the day to day running of the Council and its functions. They are often the first point of contact for residents and stakeholders when communicating with the Town Council; and have overall responsibility for overseeing all communication with residents and stakeholders. They may be contacted by phone or email and contact details are displayed on the Town website and newsletter.

3.3. Media Relations and Town Council Spokesperson

In the event of any media enquiry, the Town Clerk (in consultation with the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Council), will be responsible for issuing a response from the Town Council. Individual members of the Town Council must make clear – if they are approached for comment directly – whether they are giving their own opinion as a resident and/or member of the public, or an individual opinion or that they will be referring the matter to the Town Clerk for a formal Council response. In any event, the Town Clerk must be notified of any contact with the media as soon as possible

The Town website and other social media channels will be updated and edited by the Town Clerk. However, it is the responsibility of all Councillors to check the site regularly for any issues of inaccuracy or omissions and to inform the Town Clerk of these if and when they arise

4. Support

4.1. The Town Council will continue engaging with local organisations and will assist them in meeting their own aims and objectives. Supporting local projects and participating in local events will raise the awareness of the Council and its aims and objectives

4.2. The Town Council will achieve this by:

- Continuing to attract as many participants as possible to the scheduled Town Council meetings
- Liaising with local police on local issues
- Supporting and encouraging the work of local initiatives such as a Town litter picks, planting and environmental initiatives etc
- Facilitating and launching new initiatives – including consultation with residents in the vicinity before commencement

5. Consultation

5.1. Consulting residents on important issues will be key to the strategy. It will ensure those most affected are able to put forward an opinion and given an opportunity to make a difference.

6. Communication and Engagement

6.1. Communicating with residents and stakeholders will be achieved in several ways to ensure all sections of the community are reached:

- Town Council meetings and other Committee meetings are open to the public and include an opportunity for members of the public to engage with Councillors by making a statement or asking questions. Meeting dates are publicised at the beginning of each civic year and are available throughout the year on the Town website.
- Agendas for all meetings are sent to Town Councillors and other appropriate stakeholders and posted on the Town Council notice board and the website in advance of each meeting
- The Town Council will hold an Annual Assembly each year. It will encourage residents and stakeholders to take the opportunity to promote their ideas and raise concerns
- Contact details for all Councillors and the Clerk are available on the Town website

- The Town website will continue to be regularly updated and will include agendas, minutes and a calendar of meetings, which highlights special meetings and events. Important notices, project updates and local information sections will be updated regularly. The Town Councils policies and procedures and financial data will be accessible through the website
- Town Council and Community notice boards will continue to be regularly updated to provide information about the activities of the Council (Town Hall, Town Centre and Mill Marsh Park). These are also used by community groups, charities and voluntary organisations.
- The Town Council newsletter will be published at least three times per annum. It will focus on activities of the Council, information of voluntary events, and progress being made by the Town Council on projects and events
- Production of an Annual Town Guide for residents and visitors listing local facilities and attractions
- The Town Council will increase its online presence, using social networking where appropriate. These options may include Twitter, Facebook or a Town Council App, which could all be used to provide updates and links to new information on the Town Council website
- Localised public consultations around issues which need careful community input
- The Mid Devon Advertiser is invited to each Council meeting. Regular Press Releases are featured in the local media.
- Councillors and officers acting as representatives on Community organisations comprising local societies, community group committees, other public bodies and agencies
- Presentations to and update sessions for local groups

6.2 Information released by the Council will be jargon free and available in multiple formats.

7. Strategy

7.1. If there is an opportunity for consultation for any idea or proposal which may affect the parish, the Town Council and/or its partners will:

- Promote it through the notice boards, website, social network sites and local media. On appropriate occasions residents in a particular locality may be individually written to
- Investigate creating a website consultation or poll for those unable to attend meetings

- Aim to identify minority or hard to reach groups and identify channels of contact and consultation with them to ensure equality of opportunity
- Ensure need, priority and importance of consultation to ensure there is no misuse of the consultation process
- Identify the benefits of consultation and whether there is a real opportunity to influence decisions
- Not enter into a consultation unless the outcome can be influenced by consultees
- Publish feedback on consultations and include details of the use of information gained
- Ensure outcome of consultations are used to inform decisions and policies
- Review consultation outcomes to highlight any failings in the process to enable identification of any changes and amendments required to the strategy

8. Volunteers and Rewarding Involvement

- 8.1. The Town Council will actively seek community involvement in certain activities as:
- Acting together with residents and partners in finding solutions to local problems will ensure they will be accepted and fit for purpose
 - Acting together to carry out agreed action plans will engage the community in working with the Town Council to enhance their environments and the quality of their lives
- 8.2. Wherever possible, the Town Council will actively seek a wider audience and encourage and support the involvement of residents and stakeholders in its work.
- 8.3. The Town Council will reward community involvement and good citizenship of volunteers within its annual Community Awards scheme.

9. What Bovey Tracey Town Council Asks Of its Residents

- 9.1. To actively review the Town Council's notice boards, website and newsletter for information about meetings and events on a regular basis
- 9.2. To recognise opportunities to influence the Town Council and utilise them by responding to surveys, letters, questionnaires etc
- 9.3. To address comments, suggestions or complaints in writing by letter, or by email, or by telephone using contact information available on the Town website. Alternatively, to attend the monthly Council meeting and make use of the public participation session

10. Action Plan

10.1 In order to achieve the policy intent of the Strategy a number of potential actions have been identified for further consideration which, if progressed, will help to shape and improve the detailed activity we already undertake:

	Action for Improvement	Timescale	Lead
1	A dedicated "Community Engagement" slot at all Full Council meetings		
2	Reviewing Council Standing Orders to enable greater participation in council meetings		
3	Evaluating how better to summarise and communicate the output of council meetings swiftly in an easy-to-understand format		
4	Streamline decision making at council meetings where possible by reducing the need to take matters to multiple meetings		
5	Allowing Committee Chairs to recommend items that can be released quickly to inform the public		
6	Regular review of whether public consultations on specific issues of interest to the town are desirable (for example consulting residents about future projects that impact the precept for the following year) in order to help ascertain support in the council's decision making		
7	Reviewing the format of the Annual Town Meeting to encourage greater community participation		
8	Having a council information stall at all public street events held in the town		
9	Improving its focus on matters relating to Heathfield		
10	Resourcing more frequent use of social media, Bovey Tracey Town Council website and other means of communication to reach a wider audience		
11	A regular column in a local		

	periodical or newspaper on council matters		
12	Investigate the sharing of communication facilities to be provided through the public library and the Information Centre in the new Community building		
13	Investigate sharing resources with Teignbridge District Council or other neighbouring parishes on a part-time basis to handle any increased workload needed to achieve the council's engagement objectives		
14	Use of the new digital screens to promote Town Council activities		
15	Small and discretionary 'Surgeries' to be offered for residents to discuss specific concerns and neighbourhood issues affecting them. These could be undertaken remotely.		
16	Regularly publishing the community engagement strategy as part of the council's annual Strategic Plan		
17	Inviting members of the Bovey and Heathfield community to make suggestions on how the community engagement strategy can be improved to make it as relevant as possible to those wanting more involvement from the council or are keen for provision of regular up-to-date information on community affairs		