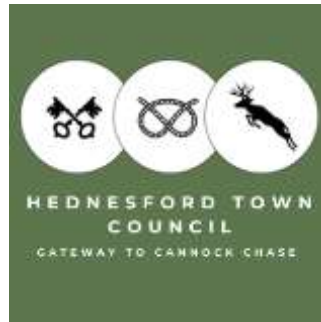**HEDNESFORD TOWN COUNCIL**

GATEWAY TO CANNOCK CHASE

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Produced June 2023
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To be reviewed June 2024

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Community Consultation Policy

Engaging Community Members in the Decision Making Process

Introduction:

Community consultation plays a vital role in fostering inclusive decision-making processes that consider the needs, concerns, and aspirations of the community. This strategy aims to outline a comprehensive approach to engage community members effectively in the decision making process. By involving stakeholders in a meaningful and collaborative way, this strategy aims to build trust, enhance transparency, and promote ownership of decisions.

1. Define the Purpose and Scope

Clearly define the purpose and scope of the community consultation, including the specific decisions or issues that require input from the community. This will help set expectation and provide a clear focus for the consultation process.

2. Identify Key Stakeholders

Identify and engage with key stakeholders who have a vested interest in the decision making process. This includes community members, local organisations, business, and other relevant stakeholders. Ensure that a diverse range of perspectives is represented, taking into account factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic location.

3. Develop Communication Channels

Establish effective communication channels to reach out to the community. Utilise a mix of traditional and modern methods to ensure maximum participation. These may include:

a. Public meetings – organise community forums or public hearings to provide a platform for face to face interaction and dialogue.

b. Surveys and questionnaires – develop surveys and questionnaires to gather quantitative date and opinions from a broader audience. Utilise both online platforms and physical copies to cater to different segments of the community.

c. Online platforms – create a dedicated website or online portal to disseminate information, collect feedback and facilitate online discussions. Consider using social media platforms to reach a wider audience

d. Workshop and Focus Groups – conduct targeted workshops and focus groups with specific stakeholder groups to explore issues in depth and gather detailed insights.

e. Information Materials – develop user-friendly brochures, fact sheets and visual aids to provide accessible information about the decision-making process and issues at hand.

4. Engage Community Leaders and influencers

Identify influential community leaders, local organisations, voluntary groups, and opinion leaders who can act as champions for the consultation process. Engage them early on and involve them in shaping the consultation approach, promoting participation, and encouraging dialogue within their networks.

5. Provide Clear and Timely Information

Ensure relevant information about the decision making process, background and potential outcomes is provided to the community in a clear, concise, and accessible manner. Present information using plain language and visual aids to enhance understanding. Share information in a timely manner to allow for meaningful input and feedback.

6. Encourage Meaningful Participation

Create opportunities for community members to actively engage and contribute to the decision making process. Consider the following methods:

a. Workshops and Co-creation sessions – organise workshops or co-creation sessions where community members can work together with decision makers to develop solutions and recommendations collaboratively.

b. Public Comment Periods – set defined periods during which community members can submit written comments, suggestions, or objections related to the decision under consideration. Ensure community members are aware of the public participation section of all council led meetings.

c. Citizen Panels – establish representative citizen panels or working groups that include a diverse range of community members. These panels can be tasked with reviewing proposals, providing recommendations, and serving as a bridge between the community and decision-makers.

d. Online Discussion Forums – set up online discussion forums or platforms where community members can engage in constructive dialogue, share ideas, and provide feedback

7. Feedback and Reporting

Demonstrate accountability and transparency by providing regular updates and feedback to the community on the consultation process and how their input has been considered. Prepare and distribute clear reports summarising

the consultation process and how their input has been considered, key findings and decisions. Provide quantitative and qualitative data.

8. <u>Evaluate</u>

The evaluation of a community consultation should be an iterative process and involve the practice of building, refining, and improving the process and should be used to continually to improve the quality and effectiveness of future consultations.

    a. Access Objectives – evaluate the extent to which the objectives of the community consultation have been met. Compare the actual outcomes with the desired outcomes and identify any gaps or areas for improvement

    b. Identify Strengths and Weakness – access the strengths and weaknesses of the community consultation process itself. Determine what worked well and what could be enhanced in future consultations. Consider factors such as inclusivity, transparency, communication strategies and participation engagement.

    c. Feedback to participants – provide the community/participants with the opportunity to review the results, ask questions, and offer their perspectives on the evaluation process.

    d. Implement Improvements – based on evaluation findings and participant feedback, identify specific areas for improvement in future community consultations. Use the insights gained to refine your approach, enhance engagement, and foster meaningful community involvement.