

# Community Engagement Strategy 2020 - 2023



Ashfield  
DISTRICT COUNCIL



**Ashfield District Council is committed to engaging with its communities in a meaningful way to help the Council achieve its core purpose as outlined in the corporate plan 2019 – 2023.**

### **Our Purpose**

1. The Council exists to serve the communities and residents of Ashfield.
2. We will provide good quality, value for money services.
3. We will act strategically and plan for the future, working with others to bring about sustainable improvements in people's lives.

**The Council has clearly defined its values. The Community Engagement Strategy demonstrates our commitment to be people focussed, honest, proud and ambitious.**

## **Our Values**

To ensure we deliver high-quality public services we have adopted a set of corporate values which underpin the successful delivery of our priorities. How we work is as important as what we do.

### **People Focussed.**

Putting people at the heart of what we do

### **Honest.**

Being honest with people in an open and professional way

### **Proud.**

Being proud that Ashfield is a positive place to live, work and visit

### **Ambitious.**

We are ambitious about Ashfield's future

## Foreword

Ashfield District Council realise the importance of engaging with people who live in the District to understand how we can deliver our services better and have ambitions to continually look to find ways to improve. Recent examples of this include consultation around the new leisure development in Kirkby, asking local residents how they'd like to see their parks improve and asking for ideas and opinions for the Towns Fund.

As part of our on-going commitment to engage with Ashfield residents, we are developing this Community Engagement Strategy to set out how we will engage with residents. We will provide training across the organisation and a tool-kit to ensure staff are sufficiently equipped to engage with communities at the right time and in the right way.

We need to fully understand how the services we deliver impact on local residents, and what changes we can make to improve the contact local people have with the Council. Furthermore, we need to work together with residents, and where appropriate have shared ownership of projects and initiatives, so that we all reap the benefits of a more joined-up and coordinated approach.

We understand that to achieve long term health benefits and reduce the inequalities that exist across Ashfield, we need to engage with people, in their communities and on their terms. We recognise the solutions lie within local communities and can be achieved by working together.

We need to explore together the opportunities that Digital Transformation can bring, and how this could lead to new ways of communicating and collaborating, and improving Ashfield as a great place to live, work and play.

We have outlined the importance of creating greater social value in Ashfield, exploring how we increase the social, economic and environmental benefits that can be gained for every £1 we spend. We will use methods of community engagement to generate new ideas and innovations, ways of working and delivering services.

One of our four corporate values is 'People Focussed' and this strategy clearly shows our commitment to this value. People will be placed at the heart of everything we do, and we will endeavour to ensure that people's voices are heard as we deliver the purpose of the Council.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of developing an engagement strategy is to be able to plan and deliver an appropriate community engagement process that will allow us to achieve our values of being people focussed, honest, ambitious and proud.

## **Aims of the strategy**

The aims of the strategy are to:

- Develop stronger relationships with people in Ashfield District Council
- Collaborate more closely with the residents of Ashfield and create solutions to challenges we face together
- Increase the number of staff trained in community engagement who deliver services directly impacting on residents
- Increase the number of projects where community engagement has been utilised to help engage with the community at an appropriate level for the piece of work/service
- Increase the number of residents who agree that Ashfield District Council puts people first

## **What is Community Engagement?**

Community engagement is a purposeful process which develops a working relationship between communities, community and voluntary organisations and public and private bodies to help to identify and act on community needs and ambitions. It involves respectful dialogue between everyone involved, aimed at improving understanding and taking joint action to achieve positive change.

Community engagement is a process which provides the foundation for:

- shared decision-making – where communities influence options and the decisions that are taken;
- shared action – where communities contribute to any action taken as a result of the engagement process; and
- support for community-led action – where communities are best placed to deal with the issues they experience and are supported to take the lead in providing a response.

Community engagement is underpinned by fairness and equality, and a commitment to learning and continuous improvement. Good quality community engagement is:

- Effective – in meeting the needs and expectations of the people involved;
- Efficient – by being well informed and well planned; and
- Fair – by giving people who may face additional barriers to getting involved an equal opportunity to participate.

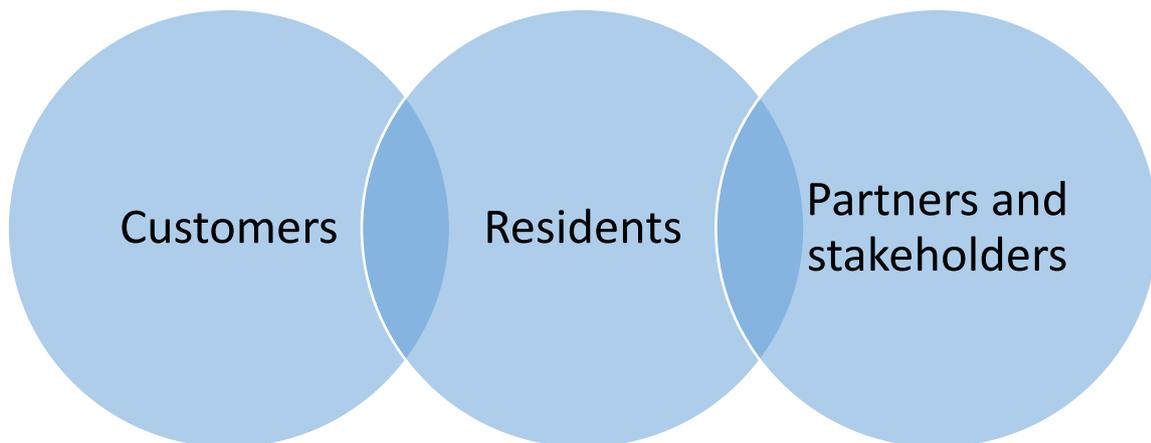
## **What are the benefits of effective community engagement?**

Good community engagement is not an outcome in itself, but is intended to lead to better democratic participation, better services and better outcomes for communities.

The outcomes of good community engagement include the following:

- The way in which public services are planned, developed and delivered is influenced by, and responds to, community need.
- People who find it difficult to get involved (for example, because of language barriers, disability, poverty or discrimination) can help to influence the decisions that affect their lives.
- The various strengths and assets in communities and across public and private sector agencies are used effectively to deal with the issues communities face.
- New relationships are developed between communities and public sector bodies which build trust and make joint action possible.
- There is more influential community participation in:
  - community-based or community-led social and economic development activity;
  - the way public authorities design and deliver services; and
  - policy, strategy and planning processes

**The audiences for this approach are:**



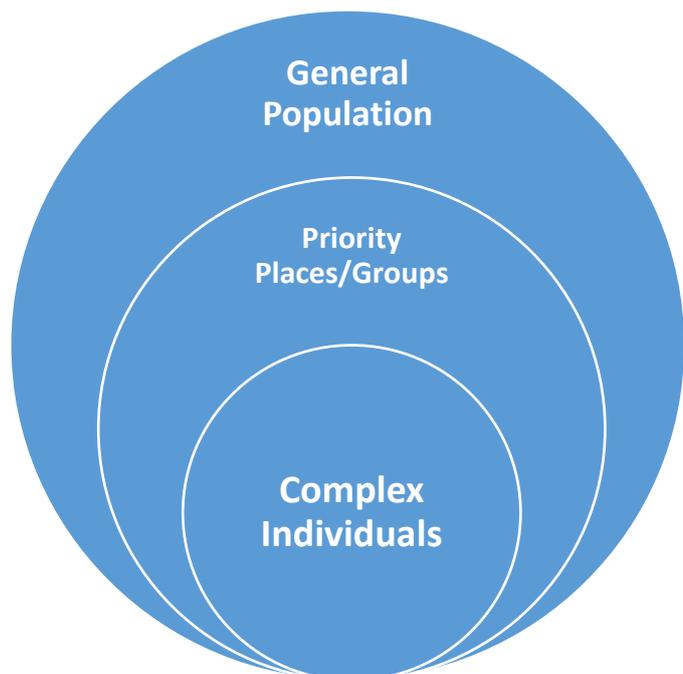
We will ensure we understand the audience we hope to engage, and will recognise that our approach will need to be flexible, dependant on how targeted we need to be to achieve the outcomes of the engagement.

**General Population** – the focus is on campaigns, messages and offers that are open to all.

**Priority Neighbourhoods** – these are the geographical areas identified as a priority due to a number of factors, including lower healthy life expectancy, high levels of smoking, obesity, poverty, deprivation and/or physical inactivity.

**Priority Groups** – these are groups of people who have been identified as a priority. For example, those living with dementia, poor mental health or are physically inactive.

**Complex Individuals** – These are the individuals who are in greatest need and are high service users, usually with a high number of complex issues requiring support.



**It is not for:**

Visitors (who don't live in Ashfield), Tenants (engaged through the housing strategy), Media (tool), Suppliers, (tool), Government, Staff including Councillors, Volunteers (engaged through the volunteering policy), Trade Unions.

## Levels of Community Engagement

The Council recognises that there are different levels of community engagement, and careful consideration will be given to what is appropriate for each project/initiative/piece of work.

The table below summarises community engagement into five levels, and clarifies for each level the purpose, the benefit and what is involved.

Level 1 - 5	What?	Why?	How?
1. Informing	Provide information	To keep people informed	Brochures, websites, news releases, social media
2. Consulting	Obtain feedback to inform decision making Obtain feedback on proposals	To keep people informed, listen to their views and provide feedback on how their input influenced decision making.	Annual surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, surveys via social media/email/SMS mobile
3. Involving	Working directly with people to ensure that their issues, concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	Engage with people to ensure that issues, concerns and aspirations are reflected in decision making. Provide feedback on how their input influenced decision making.	Public meetings, focus groups and forums, surgeries, network meetings
4. Collaborating	Working in partnership on all aspects of decision making including development of options and identifying preferred solutions.	To gain advice and innovation to find solutions from people, with the intention to incorporate contributions made to maximum extent.	Community needs analysis, focus groups, partnership groups, steering groups
5. Empowering	The final decisions are taken by the people engaged with.	To facilitate people taking responsibility for designing and delivering services/outcomes for themselves.	User led commissioning, direct service delivery, community asset transfer, skill development

## **Our Principles**

**We have developed a set of key principles which we will follow when undertaking community engagement activities.**

### **We will avoid tokenism**

The purpose of undertaking community engagement is to inform a project or initiative. We will enter into community consultation with an open mind, with a willingness to listen and understand. Decisions will not already have been taken on the matters we engage the community on.

### **We will be creative**

Community engagement should be stimulating and enjoyable. We aim to engage with people's imaginations, and will use visual methods as well as surveys. Where appropriate we may use food and music as a way of encouraging people to take part and create great community spirit.

### **We will target**

We will identify who is in our communities and make an extra effort to find and engage people from as many different parts of the community as we can – by age, ethnicity, and social grade. We will talk to people who will be affected or can benefit from our ideas.

### **We will reach out**

We won't expect people to come to us. We will go to where people are, whether that is by knocking on people's doors or standing outside the pub on a Friday night. If we need to run an event, we will plan it carefully to make it accessible, thinking about the location, timing and format. Through digital transformation, we will think of new ways to reach people in Ashfield.

### **We will feed back**

We will let the community know what they have told us. We will collect contact details if people want to be kept informed. We will let people know how their views have influenced a project/ initiative and how they can continue to have their say.

### **We will activate people**

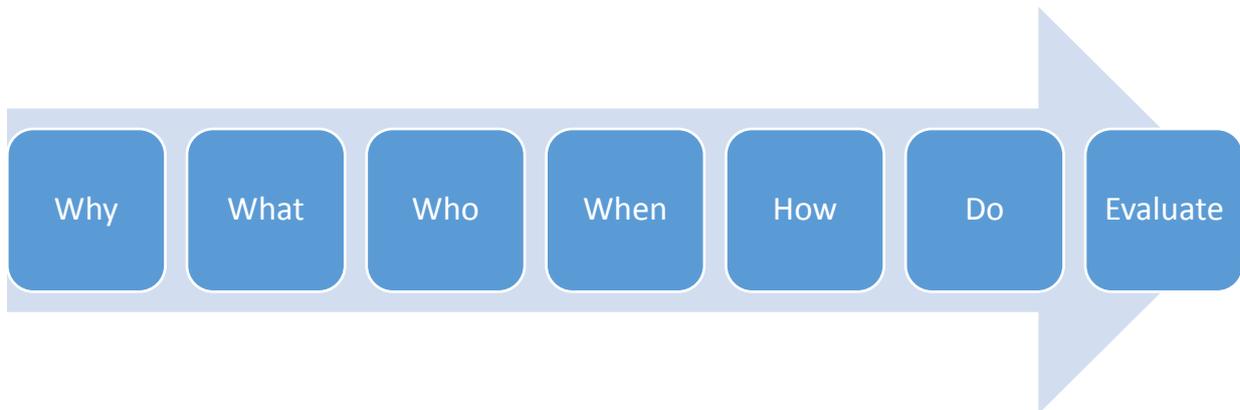
We will encourage people to get active in projects. If people are passionate and/or interested we will ask them to get involved. We will look for future leaders, fundraisers, volunteers, users and members of the project.

### **We will consider social value**

We will consider how we can gain greater social, economic and environmental benefits from engaging with people and communities.

## The Process

In order to ensure effective engagement we will follow the process below.



- Why: Why do we want to engage?
- What: What does the information we already have tell us?
- Who: Who is the target audience for this?
- When: When is the best time(s) within the project to engage?
- How: How will we engage? What methodology will we use and for what purpose? And for how long?
- Do: We will do the engagement, being mindful to communicate the answers to the above questions with our audience.
- Evaluate: We will evaluate the engagement we have undertaken and the benefits/learning from this. We will share the feedback and the actions taken/outcomes achieved with those we engaged with.

Throughout we will ensure we are inclusive, identifying and involving those residents, customers, partners and stakeholders that are affected by the focus of the engagement, and we will ensure we offer appropriate levels of support to ensure everyone affected can be involved.

We will develop a toolkit and training package to ensure all members of staff know when, how and at what level to engage with people and communities.

We will use the National Standards (2016 revision) to ensure our community engagement is inclusive and meets a consistent quality. These inform our approach for involving communities in all aspects of engagement.

## Review of this Strategy

This strategy will be reviewed annually to understand the progress that has been made and what lessons have been learned. We will further embed good practice and put clear plans in place to improve on aspects that have not gone so well. We will measure the success of the strategy based on the outcomes that have been agreed.