



Penrith Town Council

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

2022

Introduction

The Council's Communications Policy which was originally approved on 18 May 2015 records that:

"The Town Council is accountable to members of the public and has a duty to convey its decisions and actions through various media."

"All communication will be conveyed in an open and straightforward manner."

Councillors represent views and opinions of the community, support local organisations, campaign on local issues, and develop links with all parts of the community.

Councillors act as a voice for local people, help individual residents and represent their local area.

Councillors decide which policies the Council should pursue, ensure that they are carried out and monitor services provided to ensure that they are delivered in the most efficient and effective way.

To do this they need to have regular contact with the general public through Council meetings, email, letters, telephone calls, websites, social media and parish walks.

Overview

Penrith Town Council's Community Engagement Policy will demonstrate how the Council will co-ordinate our engagement with all communities within the geographical area of Penrith.

The Council recognises that:

- All people within the Penrith should be involved in the decisions that affect them.
- All people within the Penrith deserve high quality public services, shaped around their needs.
- Town Council policies and strategies should reflect local priorities, requirements and the aspirations and vision of the community of Penrith.
- The community is diverse.
- There is a need to provide appropriate opportunities for local people and the community to participate at whatever level they wish to influence service delivery, decision making and policy development.

This Community Engagement Policy aims to support the development of:

- **Strong communities** that can form and sustain their own organisations, bringing people together to deal with their common concerns.
- **Active communities** where people are supported to improve quality of life in their own communities.
- **Inclusive communities** where all sections of the community feel they have opportunities to be involved in decision making and influence public services.

Objectives

- Develop and sustain opportunities for local people and groups to influence what happens in their community.
- Provide opportunities for communities to shape and influence the development and delivery of quality services and policies that reflect local needs and priorities.
- Manage and co-ordinate engagement activities to ensure consistency, quality and partner participation and avoid duplication.
- Ensure that community engagement activities provide opportunities for participation for all sectors of the community.
- Listen to communities and ensure feedback to participants about the outcomes of consultation and engagement.
- Provide variety and flexibility and choice in community engagement activities.
- Listen and learn from our own and others' experiences and share community engagement skills and knowledge of putting the citizen at the heart of decision making.

Detailed consideration will be given to all projects, proposals and policies to ensure we achieve our stated objectives. Such decisions will be continually monitored and reviewed to ensure they are flexible and that they evolve to respond to the changing needs of our community.

In particular we will:

- Improve co-ordination and governance of community engagement activities by the development of protocols and frameworks that reach out and involve the community as a whole.
- Develop a web-based resource to engage consultation with the local community and wider interest community.
- Provide regular opportunities to make Councillors and Officers more accessible and inclusive
- Develop measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.

- Improve co-ordination with partners in engagement activities.
- Raise awareness of volunteering opportunities in the Town.
- Develop and enhance skills and expertise in engagement and participation.
- Participate in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas.
- Publicise our community engagement strategy through Councillors and others involved in local activities.
- Consider any other means available to consult and engage with the public.

Community engagement criterion

The Council will:

- Co-ordinate community engagement activities with partners to avoid duplication.
- Provide leadership to ensure that community engagement influences services and plans.
- Overcome any difficulties participants may have to enable them to participate
- Involve communities that are usually excluded.
- Ensure that there is equal access to services, and that services meet the needs of all communities.
- Use community engagement and consultation processes when there is a real opportunity for people to influence and change decisions and services.
- Ensure that community engagement activities are realistic.
- Have clear processes to feedback on community engagement activity.
- Give reasons if unable to deliver on expectations.
- Ensure participants know what they are agreeing to take part in and how the information will be used.
- Ensure awareness of confidentiality issues in community engagement activities, with particular regard to the Freedom of Information Act and Data Protection.

Community engagement activities

Penrith Town Council will engage with the community in a number of different ways:

Information

This supports all types of community engagement and keeps people informed about decisions, services and local events.

Our main means of achieving this are by:

- Mayors Report
- Annual Report
- Local Noticeboards
- Town Council Website
- Social Media
- Press releases
- Minutes
- Leaflets

Consultation

- This is used when there is a decision to be made or when there are a number of choices available.
- The Council's main means of achieving this are by feedback from Town Council Information as above; Questionnaires; Public Open Sessions; Town Council Websites.
- The Council has an approved Consultation Policy.

Attendance at meetings

- All members of the public are welcomed and encouraged to attend any Town Council meeting and dates of all meetings are publicised through noticeboard, the Council website or direct from the Town Clerk's office.
- Public speaking is available at both Town Council, Finance Committee and Planning Committee meetings and full details are widely available.
- Residents are also able to attend and take a full part in the Annual Town Meeting.

Have your say

Every resident and visitor is welcome to put forward their thoughts, ideas, concerns, criticisms or worries by telephone, email or in writing and the Town Council will consider and respond to all such communications.

Partnership working

Everyone has a part to play in making this Community Engagement Policy work.

In particular:

- All Penrith residents
- All residents of surrounding parishes
- Visitors to the Town
- Elected Members, who play a key part in delivering the aims of this Strategy
- Council staff and volunteers
- Community and voluntary sector groups and organisations
- Partners of the Town Council

Penrith Town Council seeks to work with other organisations and groups both within and outside the parish, together with individuals from the community, voluntary and private sectors to ensure that engagement activities influence the future direction of the Town.

The Council also recognises that we need to work with our local and visiting communities to encourage effective community engagement and ensure that processes are flexible and can be tailored to different groups and individuals in different areas of the Town.

The Council understands that sometimes people are reluctant to get involved and we will work with other partners to ensure that community engagement is as straightforward as possible and targeted appropriately.

The Council has an approved Partnership Protocol.

Role of councillors

Every Councillor is involved in a range of representational roles within the community and is available to his/her electors to engage in a range of local issues, raising these with the Town Council or other body as appropriate.

Every type of involvement is important in the community engagement process and different methods will be used depending on the activity and circumstances. Our aim is to demonstrate how community engagement activity can make genuine improvement to services.

Approved: July 2015

Reviewed: 2022