

# Response to Consultation - Community Engagement and Empowerment Strategy

13th January 2021

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## Contents

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<b>Response to Engagement &amp; Empowerment Strategy Consultation.....</b>	<b>2</b>
Key messages from consultation.....	2
Taking Action .....	2
Understanding & addressing the impact of previous poor experiences .....	3
Implementing improvements across the Council in relation to our communication .....	3
Suggestions to be considered as part of the implementation plans: .....	3
Summary .....	4

# Response to Engagement & Empowerment Strategy Consultation

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When the report from the first Community Conference in 2019 recommended that the Council put in place a strategy in relation to its Engagement and Empowerment approach we knew that this was one part (of a number of recommendations, plans and ambitions) that would contribute to the goal of building stronger and more trusting relationships between the Council and the community.

Strategic planning (and the documents to support this) are important for a number of reasons including (but not limited to):

- Providing clarity, direction and focus for our Organisation and the people working within it.
- Providing a 'map' for the plans and activity required to drive the changes that support our vision of being a Council who works with their community
- Communicating our vision of how we want to engage and participate with our community members – both internally and externally.

We need the Engagement & Empowerment strategy as a long term guide to keep us focused on achieving our goals and ambitions. But we understand that in order to make the progress we aspire to, that we need the contents of the strategy to be put into action – by us.

Cultural and institutional behaviour change can take time to be fully achieved and the strategy serves as a map to communicate, keep us focused on that journey and accountable to our commitment.

## Key messages from consultation

The consultations on the strategy (undertaken by both Torbay Council and Torbay Community Development Trust) show that the majority of participants felt that the contents of the strategy were clear and that the 'asks and offers' were important. There were varying views on this (some of which will be outlined below) and we need to ensure that the feedback and concerns raised are considered and addressed through the implementation planning and activities that will come under this strategy.

Overall the feedback from the consultations does not suggest that there need to be any changes to the strategy document as it is drafted.

However there was a range of constructive feedback collected alongside some very useful suggestions on the 'how' that we want to acknowledge and ensure we include in our ongoing implementation work:

## Taking Action

From both those in favour of the outlined strategy and those with concern there was an overarching and strong message in relation to action. It is critical that the ambitions set out in this strategy are implemented – and done so with priority and consistently. Repeated statements in relation to ambitions and goals (however well meaning) are breeding apathy when they are failed

to be realised or our community feel we have not delivered on them. This needs to be a core driver and focus of the implementation plan.

- Taking account and understanding differing views, needs and priorities
- The feedback highlighted and demonstrated some of the challenges we face in successfully navigating our way forwards. There was a breadth and diversity of views in relation to engagement and this needs to be both acknowledged and incorporated into our delivery plan. Examples of this included the following views on the strategy:
- It's too detailed and complicated v's it's not detailed enough
- It's really clear v's it's not clear at all
- Its radical & exciting v's disappointment that this isn't already done.
- We want to be consulted fully on everything v's don't waste time and get the job done
- Make more use of digital/online/social media platforms v's stop using digital and have more face to face/letters/leaflets
- We want Senior officers involved v's we don't want officers involved

This leads us to understand that there is no 'one fits all' approach and that we need to ensure that throughout the organisation we have consideration of this in all of our contacts and interactions with our partners and the community. This needs to be communicated to the whole organisation.

### **Understanding & addressing the impact of previous poor experiences**

We do not underestimate the impact of poor experience on the relationship and trust people have in the Council. We know that where people have had a previous poor experience we have to work even harder to rebuild that relationship, trust and confidence. The consultation identified some specific service and development areas that we need to look into as a priority to gain a deeper understanding of where things have not worked in the past and how we can improve.

### **Implementing improvements across the Council in relation to our communication**

- Work needs to be done to improve our website and phone access.
- We need to have alternative to digital and social media communication channels.
- We need a way of updating people on implementing the changes we say we are going to make.
- Officers need to be easier to reach.
- We need to ensure people with visual impairment are engaged and consulted with outside of digital/online – this also needs to be considered in the context of other groups within the community.
- Some BAME groups do not feel they can engage with the Council – we need to explore and understand this further to inform how we address this.

### **Suggestions to be considered as part of the implementation plans:**

- Having a VCSE champion for each department in the Council to act as a named link into the Council for the Voluntary and Community groups.
- Providing a letter/written update on developments/ Council work including within the annual Council Tax bills
- Ensuring that when any consultation is undertaken we need to say how and when feedback will be received – otherwise it remains a one way process.

- Having a Young Peoples Advocate to ensure representation of Young People in Council consultations.
- Establishing a 'Customer Panel' through which Council consultations can be undertaken.

## Summary

We value the time and commitment people made to contributing and feeding back on this Strategy. It is valuable to both building our relationships and working towards our goals.

We understand that true engagement and participation is challenging and hard work but we know that it is possible and we remain committed to the ambitions outlined in the Strategy. The strategy commits us to a focus on this as an organisation. We are committed to 'trying, learning and trying again' to keep moving forward to being a Council that works in partnership and has strong trusted relationships with the community.