

# Community Engagement and Empowerment Strategy

2021 - 2023



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# Working Differently

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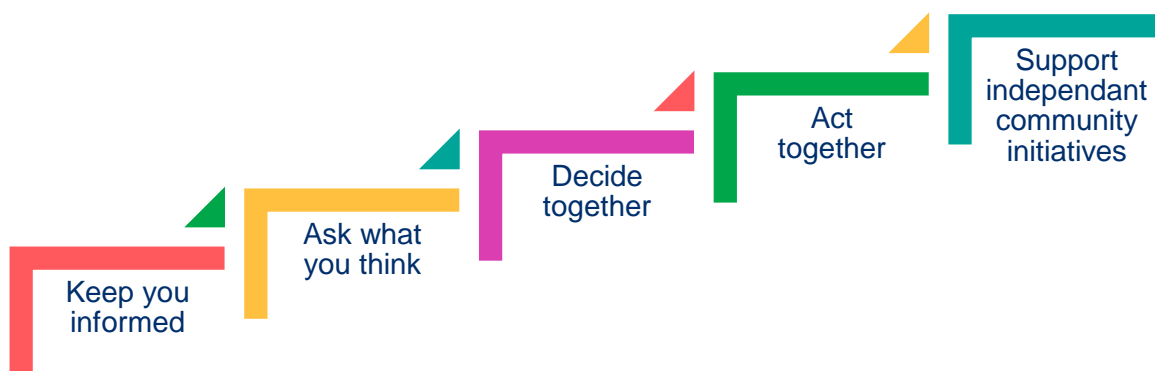
Torbay Council's mission is to be a Council that works with its residents, communities and partnerships - a council that supports, enables and empowers.

Alongside our partners in the public sector, we recognise and value the importance of a strong and vibrant voluntary sector in developing and maintaining a thriving Torbay. We also value that people and communities want to be more involved, work together, improve our relationships, and have better on-going conversations with us. In talking about Torbay's communities, we agree that the private sector are also a vital part of our community.

In order to strengthen and deepen our relationships with everyone, we commit to working differently:

- We will embrace a spirit of cooperation and partnership with the people, businesses and organisations in Torbay and those outside Torbay which affect our lives.
- We will build trusted relationships with our communities:
  - The Cabinet will talk and listen to anyone and everyone
  - Ward councillors will be community champions
  - We will facilitate and work with our communities to design and deliver services and to support one another.
- We will have continuing conversations and relationships with our communities.
- We will celebrate Torbay together.

We recognise that we have a lot of work to do but we are committed to changing how we work – moving up Torbay's ladder of participation.



In all of our work we will ensure that our approach reflects our principles:

- Enable the community
- Use reducing resources to best effect
- Reduce demand through prevention and innovation
- Integrated and joined up approach

## Using Torbay's Existing Networks

### Torbay's Community Partnerships

Torbay has a network of successful Community Partnerships which enable local people to be involved in local decision-making. The Community Partnerships provide an opportunity for people who live or work in the different parts of Torbay to discuss issues of common concern, influence the way in which services are provided and improve their local area. There are Community Partnerships for every ward in Torbay, some working in partnership with the adjacent ward, and others with more than one per ward.

The aim of the Community Partnerships is to get local people together to decide what is important to them and what needs improving in their area. They are a one-stop shop for local people to ask questions of their local Councillors, find out what is going on in their neighbourhood, or just to link up with other residents.

### Torbay's Strategic Partnership

Torbay Together is the strategic partnership for Torbay ensuring unified political, business and community leadership. Its aims are to advocate and lobby for the area, build local pride and optimism, secure infrastructure investment and position Torbay locally, nationally and internationally.

### Other Partnerships

There are a range of other partnerships already operating in Torbay, including but not limited to:

- **Safer Communities Torbay** – Torbay's Community Safety Partnership (CSP) which brings together local agencies to deliver multi-agency solutions to tackle issues such as crime, re-offending, anti-social behaviour, and substance misuse in a coordinated and collective way.
- **Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board** – which aims to deliver better, integrated services that maximise outcomes for all children and young people, and their families. It works to narrow the outcome gap between children who are vulnerable and/or from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers; on addressing the causes and effects of child poverty; and on promoting effective prevention and early intervention.
- **Local Education Board** – provides a coordinated approach to improving education outcomes within our diverse education system; enabling cultures for partnerships and alliances.
- **Destination Management Group** – ensuring a joined-up approach for tourism, working in partnership for the destination with the shared vision to develop the English Riviera's visitor economy.
- **Torbay Culture** – enabling the cultural and creative development of Torbay through collaboration, making our home – the English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark – a better place in which to live, work, learn and visit.
- **Voluntary Sector Steering Group** – Torbay Council (together with Devon County Council) and our local NHS partners want to work with the community differently and this has been progressing for some time. Phase 2 of our Model of Care talks about helping people stay well, strengthening partnerships and receiving care in the right place at the right time. The voluntary

and community sector can help us do this and are a key ingredient in developing the Model of Care.

Working on a prevention agenda collectively will allow us to work towards the best outcome for health and wellbeing of local people in order to develop our services and have an Asset Based Approach (building on the existing strengths and assets in our community) to the way we deliver care. We know that we must work together with the voluntary sector and the wider support network and services they provide.

The Voluntary and Community Sector Steering Group has been set up and has wider representation from across the sector including Healthwatch and Torbay Community Development Trust plus representation from public health, Torbay Council, Devon County Council and the NHS. The Group has enabled us to truly focus on the sector and developing the work we do with them by linking strategy and operations and sharing knowledge and experience.

## **Community and Voluntary Sector**

Sitting below these partnerships, are a vast number of groups, organisations and charities all aiming to make a positive difference to life in Torbay.

### **Brixham Town Council**

A vital link to the community in Brixham is the Town Council. Torbay Council will continue to work in partnership with the Town Council on issues within Brixham.

## **Torbay Council's New Approach**

Taking an Asset Based Community Development approach, Torbay Council wants to see our Community Partnerships at the heart of our communities – working hand-in-hand with local councillors and supported by dedicated Ward Ambassadors from across the Council's senior leadership team.

At the centre of this approach will be the Torbay Together partnership – working to ensure that all parts of the public, private, voluntary and community sector are joined up.

Together, we need to identify creative and innovative new ways of delivering effective and efficient services and providing leadership on complex, cross-cutting issues.

## **Recognising Other Community Groups**

Whilst Torbay has an established network of partnerships, we recognise that there is a multitude of other community and voluntary groups across the Bay that are not necessarily a formal part of that network. As they should, the way that these groups are established varies to suit their own needs. Some have been in place for many years, others have formed more recently.

The commitments and actions within this Strategy apply equally to how we work with the formal partnerships across Torbay as well as those other community and voluntary groups. They also apply to residents who are not part of any group – who want to take action on their own or to create new action groups.

# Our Offers and Asks

## Our Offers

We will listen to you.

We will be open about the challenges facing the Council and what we can and cannot do.

We will work together to identify the challenges within your communities – providing tools such as the Strategic Needs Assessment and the Place Standard Tool that we will balance with local knowledge and resident experience. We want to ensure that we have a strong evidence base for identifying needs, setting common priorities and responding collaboratively.

We will recognise what is strong in our communities. We will be open to ideas and always seek to understand what the community is asking for, rather than making assumptions based on existing ways of working.

We will work as One Council, and work towards One Torbay which includes all the public sector, so that communities can gain access to all public resources without duplication of effort.

We will be an organisation that our communities can trust – working together to support our communities and create a Council which is fit for the future.

## Our Asks

We would like to work directly with our residents and also through our vibrant Voluntary, Community, Social Enterprise and Business Sectors. We need to establish the best way of doing this through voluntary sector partnerships, local Community Partnerships, Neighbourhood Forums, the Business Forum and Chambers of Commerce.

For each of these partnerships we would ask that you:

- Reach out into the communities that you represent
- Share information and best practice across Torbay, encouraging learning and innovation
- Help us promote community cohesion, good community relationships and foster pride in Torbay
- Help us deliver better outcomes for local people, especially the most vulnerable in Torbay
- Help us maximise the impact of our shared budgets and resources and identify the added contribution of social value
- Support us in our efforts to attract inward investment to Torbay, in order to support the local economy and safeguard local wealth where possible through public sector procurement

We would like the Voluntary, Community, Social Enterprise and Business Sectors to work with us on delivering One Torbay: Working for all Torbay (Torbay's Community and Corporate Plan), especially in relation to:

- Creating a whole community response to make Torbay a child-friendly and age-friendly place – working together so that the people in our communities thrive
- Creating a whole community response to drive forward economic growth that is clean and inclusive – working together so that our economy thrives
- Creating a whole community response to protect our environment – working together to tackle climate change

# Keep you informed

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## Our Commitments

- We will be open and honest and timely in our communication.
- We will explain why we can and can't do things – encouraging others to work with us to deliver the things which matter to you. We will be clear about the decisions which are taken.
- We will explain our challenges, decisions and future changes in the most effective, inclusive and timely ways possible.
- We will use a range of communication methods and channels to provide information about council activities in order to signpost residents, visitors and others to the right services and, where appropriate and work together to ensure the Council's limited resources are spent in the right places.
- We will seek to develop improved communication mechanisms enabling people and communities to more easily access support, information and influence and keep more closely informed on the progress of key issues and decisions within the Council.
- We will ensure that residents who are unable to access social media receive the same information through traditional media and established community networks.

## Our Actions

- Review and improve the Council's website to make information and resources for community action more accessible, including contact information.
- Explore with Torbay Community Development Trust and other community representatives how [www.torbaytogether.org.uk/](http://www.torbaytogether.org.uk/) can be developed and expanded to take on a broader role around community engagement. Ensure that this work links to that of the Torbay Together partnership, streamlining information wherever possible.
- Maximise the effectiveness of social media – through both our own channels and through existing groups – to engage with our communities. This will include encouraging councillors and senior officers to join the conversation on social media.
- Ensure that communication between council departments is effective with a shared overall message.



# Ask what you think

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## Our Commitments

- Communication will be two way. We will listen, understand, remember, evaluate and feedback to stakeholders the actions we have taken.
- We will provide clear, regular and reliable information which will provide you with the opportunity to play an active role in influencing decisions and shaping the future of services.
- We will engage with our communities and stakeholders in a timely way so they are informed and are able to have their say on local decisions and when we can't do this we will be clear and transparent as to why.
- We will ensure that our consultation is based on a genuine exchange of views, with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action. It will involve:
  - Listening and learning from local people, communities and other stakeholders.
  - Seeking to involve local people, communities, businesses, voluntary sector organisations and other organisations in important decisions which have an impact on them.
  - Seeking opinions on options before a decision is reached.
  - Passing out information and receiving comments.
- In providing feedback to our communities, we will explain how we have taken into account community views, including if we have not been able to take everyone's views on board in the final decision.

## Our Actions

- Agree a Community Engagement and Consultation Programme at the start of each Municipal Year. The programme will include targeted activity aimed at involving and connecting with those groups and geographical communities less likely to engage with the Council.
- The Cabinet will hold at least three Cabinet Conversations each year and will host an annual Community Conference. These will each feature a "You Said, We Did" session.
- There will be regular Ask Us events – either online or in venues across Torbay.

# Decide together

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## Our Commitments

- We will ensure that our communities and stakeholders are involved in the decision making process and are given the opportunity to help find solutions through high quality, appropriately targeted consultation and engagement.
- We will ensure that people are given the opportunity to play an active role by shaping the future of services which may affect them and identifying any changes which may be required to local services.
- We will be realistic about our limitations and the need for the council to use reducing resources to best effect.
- We will develop and sustain a relationship with the community in order for us to understand and act together to address the needs of that the community and to work towards a common vision.

## Our Actions

- Involve communities and organisations earlier in the service planning process in order to ensure that activities are based on a shared understanding of community needs and issues.
- Increase opportunities for co-production – developing systems that enable communities and organisations to be equal partners in designing and commissioning public services and in determining the use of public resources.
- Provide feedback to communities and organisations outlining how their contributions have influenced decisions made by the Council and what has changed or improved as a result.
- Encourage communities to take responsibility for outcomes themselves and help develop different models for service delivery
- Work to remove barriers to help aspiring groups and individuals.

# Act together

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## Our Commitments

- We will engage, encourage and support our communities and stakeholders in order to bring about positive change for the good of the whole community.
- We will work together to give people a better sense of ownership of the services and activities available to them.
- We will use an integrated and joined up approach, both within the council and with our partners, to achieve value for money, to avoid consultation fatigue and to ensure messages are consistent.

## Our Actions

- Provide support to ward councillors in their community leadership role through the appointment of Ward Ambassadors who can act as a single point of contact to help deliver local solutions.
- Work to engage young people in the work of the Council and community groups. This will be progressed through the Children and Young People's Partnership Board and the Imagine This partnership.
- Work to develop stronger relationships between schools, colleges and their local communities using the Local Education Board as a facilitator.
- Work with sports clubs and groups (including Torquay United) to further build their engagement with the community, especially young people.
- Strengthen the connections between housing providers, relevant agencies and community groups, building on the work already undertaken to ensure positive relationship with Registered Housing Providers.
- Support and encourage community weekends, festivals and other events.
- Support capacity building for key community groups, to include training.
- Develop a community engagement protocol/framework to use in designing and developing new projects and seeking funding – ensuring the community is involved from the start.
- Develop a protocol or guidance for contractors around engagement with communities.

# Support independent community initiatives

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## Our Commitments

- We will offer community-based initiatives support to become as effective as possible.
- We will minimise barriers for community service delivery whilst maintaining our duty of care and legal requirements.

## Our Actions

- Work to establish a “space” – potentially as part of **[www.torbaytogether.org.uk](http://www.torbaytogether.org.uk)** – to celebrate and showcase success and good practice in community engagement, highlighting in particular good “teamwork” between the Council and communities. Use this platform to connect like-minded individuals who want to work in partnership to achieve specific outcomes in their neighbourhoods. Actively seek individuals and groups to undertake and/or participate in environmental, coastal, open space and heritage improvements.
- Empower our staff to be more flexible and responsive in engaging with the public and communities. Commission a training programme for staff and Councillors around community engagement and working with community groups and volunteers.
- Establish a Community Enablement Fund to provide seed funding for community action
- Work with the Torbay Community Development Trust (TDCT), Torbay’s Community Builders and others to enable community action and the engagement of those who do not normally participate locally.
- Lend support to partners, including the TCDT and the Integrated Care Organisation, to jointly develop and implement a volunteer strategy for Torbay.
- Explore options to expand the Council’s Leave Arrangements Policy to cover and encourage volunteering in order that Council officers can make available and share their expertise with community groups.
- Improve the awareness of support available to community groups and social enterprises.

## Appendix 1: Our duties

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**The duty to inform, consult or involve** is set out within the Local Government Act 1999 and Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

In exercising the general duty under the Local Government Act 1998, local authorities must 'make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness'

In deciding how to fulfil the general duty the local authority must have 'due regard' for any guidance issued by the Secretary of State and should consult with the following:

- Any person or representatives who are liable to pay any tax, precept or levy in respect of the authority.
- Any person or representatives who are liable to pay non-domestic rates in respect of any area within which the authority carries out functions.
- Any person or representatives who use or are likely to use services provided by the authority.
- Any person or representatives appearing to the authority to have any interest in any area within which the authority carries out functions.

The Government's **Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity** provides guidance on the content, style, distribution and cost of local authority publicity.

It states that publicity by local authorities should be based on the following seven principles:

- Lawful – It will comply with the Advertising Standards Authority's Advertising Codes.
- Cost effective – It will provide value for money.
- Objective – It will be politically impartial.
- Even-handed – It can address matters of political controversy in a fair manner, but the publicity will not affect support for a single councillor or group.
- Appropriate – refrain from retaining the services of lobbyists. The frequency of any council newsletters should be no more than quarterly.
- Have regard to equality and diversity – Publicity to positively influence public behaviour and attitudes in relation to issues such as safety and health can be used.
- Issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity (such as elections and referendums).

## Appendix 2: Principles for communication, consultation and engagement

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To ensure Torbay Council meets its duties as well as the aims and objectives within this Strategy, all communication, consultation and engagement activity will be developed in line with the following guiding principles:

**Clear and concise:** We will use plain English and avoid jargon and acronyms in all our communications to ensure messages and purposes are clear, understandable and accessible. When consulting we will only ask questions which are necessary and easy to understand.

**Purpose:** All our activity will have a clear and defined purpose, linked to our Community and Corporate Plan. We will only consult or carry out marketing and public relations activity if there is an identified objective. Consultation and engagement will be used to influence local decision making.

**Timely:** All communication, consultation and engagement activity will, when possible, be planned in advance so consistent messages can be used at the right time, in the right way with the right people. We will openly inform, engage, discuss and consult with stakeholders at the earliest possible opportunity, ideally when proposals are being developed or when information is confirmed and becomes available. Due consideration will be given on the lead up to any elections or referendums to whether it is appropriate to launch new campaigns and consultation or engagement activity.

**Proportionate timescales:** The length of time for consultation and engagement activity will be judged against the nature and impact of the proposal / issue being consulted upon. We will ensure that sufficient time is given for respondents to consider any information provided and that there is sufficient time for them to provide an informed response.

**Targeted:** We will ensure that all our communications and consultations are targeted at the right stakeholder groups so they are effective and use resources in the best possible way. Where proposals, events or services affect specific individuals or groups, these stakeholders will be made aware of the activity so they can find out more, have their say or become involved. Consultation activity, in particular, will be tailored to meet the needs and preferences of different groups of people across Torbay, ensuring accessibility for all.

**Relevant information:** We will provide enough information, or signpost stakeholders to where they can obtain more information, to ensure that informed choices can be made. This could include how to access a particular service or how to resolve an issue. It could also relate to specific proposals and include information about how the options have been considered and details of any assessments of costs, benefits and impacts which have been carried out.

**Feedback:** We will ensure that any internal or external feedback will be conscientiously taken into account and will be considered in any final decision making. With regard to consultations, the results will be used to inform the development of relevant impact assessments. We will publish the

results of consultation and engagement activity within eight weeks of the activity, stating how many responses were received and how they have been used in formulating the recommendation.

**Forward thinking:** We will actively explore and assess how we can best use new technology and other new communication channels to reach and engage as many people as possible.

**Corporate identity and style guidelines:** All communications involving the council will meet our corporate identity guidelines. This is to protect the brand identity, to maintain the council's professional image and to ensure all council activity is consistent and accountable. This includes use of the Torbay Council logo, images and our house presentation style.

**Partnership agreements:** As we embrace a stronger integrated and joined up approach it is important that all partners agree in advance how any partnership activity will be carried out and communicated. This is to ensure there are consistent messages and that all communication and engagement protocols and corporate identity guidelines are met.

**Responsibility:** We acknowledge that communication is a two way process and is the responsibility of everyone. Council employees, elected members and all stakeholders have a role to play in open, timely and effective communication, consultation and engagement with each other.

**Monitoring and evaluation:** Given the important emphasis on using our resources to best effect, the way in which we communicate, consult and engage should be inclusive and effective. Monitoring and evaluating activity, where possible, will identify if we have met defined goals, areas that need exploring further and activity which can be improved.

