Community Engagement Policy

1. Introduction

   The objectives of the policy are to;
   a) Encourage effective local community engagement;
   b) Ensure that embedded throughout the Council there is clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions that affect them;
   c) Enable aspirations/comments/suggestions obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way services are being delivered;
   d) Identify how the Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to hard to reach groups such as young people, elderly people, those with physical disability, language barriers, financial constraints, cultural differences or social expectations.)

   Boxley Parish Council advocates giving local people a voice and involving them in decisions which affect them and their community. This may include individuals, voluntary and community organisations as well as other public sector bodies. It provides opportunity for local people to talk to the Council about their aspirations and or needs in their community and neighbourhood. It allows the Council to consult with and inform people about what services it provides, how it prioritises, how policies are determined and how well it's performing.

   The key aspects of community engagement include:

   - Development of a network of relationships between Boxley Parish Council, individuals, voluntary and community groups, neighbouring Parish Councils and Borough and County Councils.
   - Clear and open communication to ensure that information is made accessible to all groups.
   - Listening and understanding from a range of people to identify aspirations, needs and problems of local people and groups.

   Effective and meaningful community engagement can provide a number of benefits:
   - The problems and needs of local people are clearly identified in order that appropriate new or improved facilities /services can be provided.
   - Those participating feel empowered by being involved in decision making in their local community. This may result in enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections and standing for council.

2. Boxley Parish Council and Community Engagement

   The Parish Council will facilitate community engagement in the following ways:

   a) Making information on what decisions are being considered and how residents can influence or contribute to the discussions in good time.
   b) Methods used to ensure engagement will be - through the Parish Council website, notice boards, posters, Facebook, Community Alert Emails, Leaflets, consultations and word of mouth.
   c) All meetings of the Parish Council will be open to the public and press and there is a period set aside for residents to speak. Residents can access agendas for meetings via the Parish Council web site and notice boards.
   d) The Parish Council website explains the procedure for residents wishing to speak at meetings.

e) Residents can, where appropriate or necessary, make written reports/present petitions or have a case presented on their behalf to Councillors.

f) Planning applications are considered at Environment Committee meetings held twice a month and provides opportunities for people to speak on those agenda items that affect them. Equal opportunity is given to applicants/supporters/objectors/local community groups.

g) The Parish Clerk, Assistant Clerk and Clerical Officer are required to play neutral roles so that residents can be fully involved and be confident that they are receiving unbiased information and support. This neutral involvement will allow more flexibility in the service and the personal element of the contact, will hopefully encourage more involvement from the hard to reach members of the community. Details of how to contact the Parish Clerk/Office are displayed on notice boards and the Parish Council website.

h) The Parish Council will produce a list of annual meeting dates to include the start times and locations of the meetings.

i) The Parish Council will be open and accountable in its dealing with residents and the community. It will make information on its policies and procedures freely available.

j) The Parish Council will be receptive to requests from residents or communities and will attempt to be flexible in order to ensure their opinions are known not only to the Parish Council but also to other organisations. This may be by including an item for discussion on an agenda or allowing a local group to put their opinions into an official report undertaken by the Parish Council.

k) Parish Councillors will continue to represent the Council on various outside bodies, to ensure that they are kept informed of the communities' needs.

l) When dealing with controversial issues that affect a particular community then consideration will be given to holding a public meeting.

m) Consultations and surveys are to be considered when necessary and appropriate and results will be made available.

n) Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups when the need arises.

o) Promoting elections and the importance of the democratic process and the value of being a Councillor.

p) Promoting the value to the parish of volunteering

3. The Parish Council will review its community Engagement Strategy on an annual basis to ensure that it remains relevant.

4. Freedom of Information

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this document will be posted on the Council website and copies will be available from the Parish Office.

Boxley Parish Council is committed to improving its community engagement by:

a) Continuing all the above activities and services into the future and improving relationships with community groups, including developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.

b) Boxley Parish Council will be proactive and will be willing to consider any reasonable opportunities that support its purpose of making information available and increasing contributions from the community, especially those difficult to reach.

c) Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between Council and other community groups; in order to encourage new relationships/partnerships to be formed and to raise community spirit.

Adopted by Council September 2022