

KESSINGLAND PARISH COUNCIL



Community Engagement Policy

Adopted: Feb 2019
Review Date: Feb 2022

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Introduction

Kessingland Parish Council is the tier of local government which is closest to the local community and as such it is able to develop good links with residents. The Council realises that the services it provides should reflect the needs of its parishioners and the locality. It acknowledges that residents should have greater influence over local services and be involved in decisions affecting them and their local area and in shaping the future of their parish.

The Council and the individual Councillors elected to serve on it play a vital role as they make decisions about services and facilities in the village which affect the quality of life for residents and for those who work in or visit the village. We aim to make a positive difference to the lives of our community.

This Policy outlines how the Council will endeavour to ensure that the community is kept informed about and is able to contribute to the activities and decision-making of the Council for the benefit of everyone associated with the village.

Objectives

Kessingland Parish Council strives to be an open and transparent Council, which values the opinions of the community which it serves and makes information about the Council's activities and expenditure readily available to the public. We will regularly publish and update this information, invite comments and listened to the needs and concerns of residents and will do everything within our powers and financial constraints to make Kessingland a better place to live, work or visit.

The Council will:

- Encourage effective local community engagement.
- Ensure that community engagement is embedded within the Council so there is clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions that affect them.
- Provide clear and open communication to ensure that information is made accessible to all.
- Identify how the Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community, especially with reference to hard to reach groups.
- Encourage feedback from the community.
- Develop a network of relationships between the Council, individuals, voluntary and community groups.
- Listen and promote understanding from a range of people to identify aspirations, needs and problems of local people and groups.
- Ensure that the views of local people are heard and used to develop, enhance and improve service, the environment and the quality of life for residents.

The Council will ensure that:

- The problems and needs of local people are clearly identified so that appropriate new or improved facilities / services can be provided.
- Those participating feel empowered by being involved in decision making in their community.
- The quality and delivery of services within the parish are improved, planned and shaped according to local needs and priorities, including the future planning of services.
- The general wellbeing of the parish and its residents are enhanced.
- The promotion of a stronger, more active and cohesive parish is achieved.

- The roles of Councillors are better understood and the capacity of local councillors to act as leaders of the community they represent are strengthened.
- Enhanced leadership by the Council and greater interest in elections and standing for the Parish Council.
- Improved satisfaction with local public services

Defining the Community

The community of Kessingland is defined as consisting of:

- Residents of the parish
- Users of Parish Council Services
- Visitors / tourists
- The playing field users
- Francis Road and Church Road Play Area and Car Park users
- Visitors to the Marshes Nature Reserve
- Young people who live or go to school in the village
- Those who work, whether permanently or temporarily, in the parish
- Businesses
- Interest groups, club and societies
- Voluntary and charitable organisations
- Groups of people defined by a common factor such as age, disability, faith and other groups
- Councillors and public service representatives.

In particular, the Council will attempt to engage with those hard to reach groups who experience social exclusion and are sometimes perceived as being disempowered. Such examples include young people, elderly people, those with physical disabilities, language barriers, financial constraints, cultural differences or social expectations. The Parish Council will endeavour to communicate with these groups to seek their views but it is recognised that some people wish to exclude themselves through personal choice.

Principles of Community Engagement

The Parish Council will adhere to the following principles for community engagement:

Honesty and Openness – We will make clear the purpose of any engagement activity and will use the right methods, proportionate to the significance of the issues, to engage the local community. We will be clear about what can be influenced and will use honest, accurate and unbiased information.

Listening – We will listen and respond to individuals and communities, enabling services and empowering parishioners to play an effective role in setting priorities, designing services and influencing decisions to shape their local area.

Inclusion – We will undertake fair and impartial engagement to a high standard to ensure that all parishioners are offered equal opportunities to participate in issues that may affect them and make a difference.

Working Together – We will act together when appropriate with a consistent approach to community engagement. We will share knowledge and information openly with parishioners and partner organisations, whilst respecting confidentiality. We will use what has been learnt from contact with local people to better understand and engage with the community and to improve the delivery of services.

Keeping in Touch – We will provide feedback and demonstrate the changes that are made as a result of engagement.

Facilitating Community Engagement

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

- Making information on what decisions are being considered and how residents can influence or contribute to discussions in good time.
- Methods used to promote engagement will be through the Parish Council website, notice boards, newsletters, Facebook page (social media), consultations, surveys, focus groups, workshops, reports and word of mouth.
- All Parish Council meetings are open to the public and press to attend and there is a period set aside for residents to speak on items on the Agenda.
- Parish Council Agendas are available on the website and on notice boards or a copy can be provided on request.
- The Minutes from Parish Council meetings are made available on the website or a copy can be provided on request.
- Planning applications are considered at the monthly Parish Council meetings - details for which are included on the Agenda. Equal opportunity is given to applicants, supporters, objectors and local community groups.
- Details of how to contact the Parish Clerk and Parish Councillors are included on notice boards, in the newsletter and on the Council website.
- A Schedule detailing the dates of all Parish Council meetings is available on the website and on notice boards. The date for the next scheduled Parish Council meeting is also included on the end of Agendas.
- Producing an Annual Report on the Parish Council's activities over the previous year, informing residents on important issues. Copies of the report will be available at the Annual Meeting of Parish and on the Council's website, availability of the report on Facebook and copies made available in the Parish Council Office and in the library.
- The Council will be open, transparent and accountable in its dealings with residents and the community and will make information on its policies and procedures freely available.
- We will respond positively to compliments and complaints that are received and respond appropriately in accordance with the Council's Complaints Procedure.
- We 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.
- Parish Councillors will continue to represent the Council on various outside bodies to ensure that they are kept informed of their communities needs.
- The provision of information to the public under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Council's Publication Scheme.

Communication

Kessingland Parish Council is committed to improving community engagement by:

- 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.

- Being proactive and willing to listen to any reasonable opportunities that support the Council's purpose of getting information and increasing contributions from the community, especially those difficult to reach.
- Dealing with controversial issues that affect a particular community and considering holding a public meeting to engage and promote understanding.
- Undertaking consultations and surveys when necessary and appropriate - the results from which will be made publically available.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups when the need arises.
- Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other community groups, in order to encourage new relationships / partnerships to be formed and to raise community spirit.
- Promoting elections and the importance of the democratic process and the value of being a Councillor.
- Promoting the value to the parish of volunteering.

Partnership & Advocacy

Kessingland Parish Council will work proactively with other organisations working in the parish to strengthen and improve working relationships across all organisations, local businesses and voluntary groups in order to work collaboratively on issues that need to be addressed where it is appropriate to do so. Where the Parish Council is not directly responsible for a service query raised by a resident we will often be able to sign post them to the relevant organisation which will be able to deal with the issue.

How will the Effectiveness of this Community Engagement Policy be Measured?

The effectiveness of this Community Engagement will be able to be evaluated through:

- Increased public feedback and participation.
- People feel they are being kept well informed by the Council.
- The Council listens to the public's views and acts on their concerns or responds appropriately.
- People feel their complaints are well handled.
- People feel the Council is trustworthy and acts in their best interests.
- Greater public involvement / contributions informing decision making.
- The community is generally satisfied with the way in which the Council is run and with the services provided by the Council and that it provides value for money.
- The electorate exercises their right to vote at local elections.

Review

This policy will be reviewed every three after it has been adopted by the Parish Council to ensure that its aims and objectives are being met.