

Hurstbourne Tarrant Parish Council

Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme - Application

Reference 5.8.1

Hurstbourne Tarrant - Community Engagement Strategy

For Hurstbourne Tarrant parish council, a community engagement strategy is about giving all our parishioners a voice and the opportunity of involving them in the decisions that affect them and their own local community. Although Hurstbourne Tarrant is a small rural parish it does consist of three distinct areas of population – the main village of Hurstbourne Tarrant, Upton village which is shared with Vernham Dean parish council and the hamlet of Ibthorpe. Given this diverse background of small communities the development of good working relationships and communications are essential to gaining a good understanding of individual needs and priorities and then shaping the delivery of improving services and implementing the most important projects as determined by parishioners for the parish as a whole.

The main objective of the Hurstbourne Tarrant Community Engagement Strategy is to engage residents and encourage their participation in decision making to secure better services and develop into a more active and informed community.

The parish has an excellent working example with our new community centre project that is ably demonstrating the impact that effective community engagement can achieve. When faced with a high priority need to replace dilapidated church hall and sports pavilion buildings with a new multi-purpose community centre that would support a wider range of uses and interest groups within the parish. This community led project, supported by the parish council has brought together a strong mix of individual skills and expertise drawn from across the whole parish to drive forward both the design and planning and generating the fund raising activities necessary to deliver a new community centre within the next 5 years. One interesting observation of the impact and value that this project has already brought to the community is as it works together to run fund raising events in support for the new community centre, it is strengthening the community itself and bringing it closer together which will be of long term benefit.

One of the unique strengths of a small rural parish is that the parish councillors are collectively known to and know of nearly all the parishioners through some form of direct personal contact. All councillors and officer are open to and encourage direct communication and dialogue with parishioners regarding parish services. Councillors are able to sound out opinion and views on parish council activities and address issues and concerns very quickly often enabling solutions to be reached in a simple and pragmatic manner. It also provides a very sound understanding of parishioners' needs and aspirations and helps us identify where services can be improved. Some of the recent parish council successes working with harder to reach groups:

- Mentoring of individual young people with a record of antisocial behaviour problems
- Traveller family support integrating them into village life and local school
- Upton village focus to provide events for isolated children and parents
- Teenage consultation on facilities leading to the provision of a teenage shelter.

Given these close working contacts between councillors and parishioners we currently believe our communication with 'hard to reach groups' is sound but need to maintain a watching brief on this area for the future.

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The parish council employs a range of standard methods for providing information about parish services and activities.

- The use of public notice boards placed in the three village centres
- Public participation session at each PC meeting
- Through a village and parish council website – www.hbt.org.uk
- Placing of regular articles and summary of PC minutes in each publication of the Parish magazine
- The use of open public meetings to address significant events or issues within the parish – for example safer route to school, specific planning applications and the recent review of Hurstbourne Tarrant's conservation area.

The next stage of improving our communication and consultation methods would be to extend the simple visitors' comment box feedback on our website into an on-line comments forum and opinion survey facility. This would provide a direct and simple tool to gather comments and feedback relating to parish councils services. In addition it would also provide an opportunity for parishioners to raise issues and concerns, identify needs and interests, to ask questions and submit their own ideas and initiatives for consideration by the parish council. The parish council has made use of full household surveys a couple of times in recent years but use of this technique has been limited on cost grounds within a small rural parish.

The parish council does have a comments/complaints/suggestions/compliment procedure, guide and leaflet but usage is low with very few complaints being received. An improvement in this area would be to develop a measurement system of customer satisfaction with parish services and ensure both service improvements and / or any areas of dissatisfaction are then be properly addressed through an improvement action planning process. The best longer term approached would be to consider the option of implementing an improved on-line comments and survey facility on our village and parish council website.

Both the comments and on-line survey tools will be referenced within our routine articles in our parish magazine and regular requests encouraging parishioners to provide feedback and comments using these on-line tools could be directed through our website.