

Un Llais Cymru



One Voice Wales

Community & Town Councils
Best Practice Guide No 1
Community Engagement
(Issued August 2020)



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This guide is the first in a series of Best Practice Guides produced by One Voice Wales aiming to share best practice to drive up the improvement and development agenda across the sector.

Contents

4. A Brief Overview
5. Engaging for A Reason
6. Ten National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales
7. Policy Context
8. Winners of the Best Community Engagement Award 2020 - Pembrey and Burry Port Town Council
9. Winners of Best Community Engagement Project 2019 - Blaenavon Town Council
10. Winners Best Community Engagement Award 2018 – Llanelli Town Council
11. Winners Best Community Engagement Award 2017—Borth Community Council
12. One Voice Wales Training
13. References
15. About One Voice Wales

Community Engagement - A Brief Overview

Community engagement is now embedded in government policy at all levels across the UK and in Wales and across the all sectors.

It is recognised that communities should have the opportunity to be involved in the decisions that affect their daily life.

Community engagement is a complex process and this Best Practice Guide brings together Information for Councils to share the learning and experiences of other Councils to build an opportunity to plan how the community can be engaged in local projects and decision making.

The Aims of a Community or Town Council

- Build & serve the community
- Build and sustain communities
- Deliver quality public services
- Build local democracy
- Be a good employer

There are 735 community and town councils in Wales with around 8000 councillors. A community or town council is the part of local government which is closest to the people. They serve the smallest area and are responsible for the most local of matters. The main aim of a community or town council is to represent and serve its local community. It can do this by building and sustaining communities, through providing better public services, and through building local democracy.

Why Should Councils Engage

The Council's role is to work for the community and engagement:-

- Underpins democracy
- Validates the Council's leadership role
- Explains the Council's power to precept and its duties and responsibilities
- Informs the budget making process
- Council's role is to bridge the local community, different levels of government and other sectors
- Helps the Council to represent community views
- Two way process provides and gathers feedback about services and issues
- Improves transparency and accountability
- Fulfils public expectations
- Opportunity to challenge assumptions, prejudices, ill-informed opinion and misunderstanding.

Engaging for a Reason

Formal Engagement

Where	How	Purpose
On the street	Questionnaire/Clipboard	Gather views/information
Public venue	Public meeting with presentation	Provide information and gather views
Via Social Media	Questions	Gather views/information

Informal Engagement

Where	How	Purpose
On the street	Informal conversation	Listening to views/ideas
At a social evening/ coffee morning	Place markers on a map	Find out key areas of concern

Councillors are always 'formally' representing their Council they engage in a variety of places and use different approaches and are continually 'assessed' by their communities on how they engage, support and work with their communities.

'Formal' and 'informal' engagement requires different skills and approaches

It is sensible to consider engaging professional support and guidance when developing an engagement survey.

One Voice Wales' Innovative Practice Award Scheme has a category for Community Engagement and a number of winning entries from the last four years of the Award Scheme are highlighted later in this guide.

Ten National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales

1. Engagement is designed to make a difference
2. Encourage & enable everyone affected to get involved if they so wish
3. Engagement is planned and delivered in a timely and appropriate way
4. Work with relevant partner organisations
5. The information provided will be jargon free, appropriate and understandable
6. Make it easier for people to take part
7. Enable people to take part effectively
8. Engagement is given the right resources and support to be effective
9. People are told the impact of their contribution
10. Learn and share lessons to improve the process of engagement

www.participationcymru.org.uk

Policy Context

- Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011
- Local Government (Wales) Democracy Act 2013
- Social Care & Wellbeing (Wales) 2014
- Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015
- Planning Act (Wales) 2015
- Environment (Wales) Act 2016
- Alternative Delivery Models
- Final Report of Independent Local Council Review Panel
- Local Government & Elections (Wales) Bill 2019 (likely to be enacted in 2020)

Winners of the Best Community Engagement Award 2020

Pembrey & Burry Port Town Council is committed to real and effective engagement with the community. It has embarked on a programme designed to establish multi channels of communication with the residents and a structure which enables the community to fully participate in the decisions the Council takes.

Public meetings held at which priority issues were communicated by members of the community and local voluntary organisations and six community forums were established, much in line with the themes of the Wellbeing legislation.

Each forum is chaired by a Councillor in the first instance and made up of members of the community with an interest in that particular area

They produce short, medium and long term proposals which are incorporated by the Council into the Community Strategy, voted on by the public.

A community strategy board made up of representatives from each forum and the Town Council will monitor and scrutinise the delivery of the agreed strategy.

Input is not limited to community members of the forums only but is available to all through the Vo-caleyes platform on a real time basis.

To ensure that the voice of the younger generation is not ignored the Council has established shadow forums in the local schools, both secondary and primary, who have a direct input into the work of the community forums through the Council Community Development Officer

The results of this initiative have been stunning and include the following;

The Resilience forum fed into the Councils Parks policy and are deeply involved in the creation of a different planting strategy, the creation of a sensory garden and a community orchard.

The Health Forum is working to make the town Dementia friendly, set up a Board Games club to combat loneliness and isolation and is pressurising the local NHS for more local GPs

The Economy Forum is pushing local apprenticeships and has convinced the Town Council to lead the way by taking on the first one. It is now working on a local shops discount and rewards pilot.

The cohesive forum together with the Council has been rewarded a grant of £8.5K to deliver an inter-generational project on modern technology and is setting up a new youth group

The Culture Forum has been successful in gaining Carmarthenshire's Town of Culture 2020 and is delivering a programme of events including:

Youth Workshops and Fundays	Art Festival
International Food Festival	Wellbeing Days
Local Hero Awards	Town Eisteddfod

and many more events, working with the community and community organisations to engage all ages.

Perhaps one of the most important impacts of this initiative has been the vast improvement in involvement and wellbeing across the whole community.

Through community engagement, the individuals of our community can feel included in the decisions made for THEIR community.

Winners of Best Community Engagement Project 2019



Blaenavon Town Council - The Blaenavon Intergenerational Community Project began in May 2018 as part of Dementia Action Week. Funded by Blaenavon Town Council in partnership with Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, the project launch took place at Big Pit, Blaenavon. The aim of the project was to engage with a cross-section of the community, be based on age-friendly and dementia-friendly principles and be facilitated by volunteers of all ages - including young people from the Hwb Youth Provision in Blaenavon. ‘More & Better’ funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation further enhanced the volunteering strand.

With Blaenavon having an above average and increasing population of older people, the Council recognised that intergenerational practice and social prescribing was hugely beneficial as a key mechanism to improve the lives and well-being of both young and old.

The project offered deeper engagement activity seeking to address social issues, certainly in terms of communities working together. It highlighted a noticeable improvement in people’s confidence, providing opportunities to share skills, adding meaning to people’s lives and helping tackle the loneliness and isolation which affects all ages.

Our engagement was delivered with strong support from our key partners namely:

Alzheimer’s Society; British Red Cross; Bron Afon Community Housing; Torfaen County Borough Council; Royal British Legion; Dementia Engagement & Empowerment Project; Western Power Distribution; Hwb – Blaenavon; Ageing Well in Wales – Older Person’s Commissioner for Wales.

An agreed theme of the project was to provide new engagement methodology incorporating local heritage, framed by the Welsh Government’s Fusion project. This aims to improve life in deprived communities through cultural activities, thus putting Blaenavon at the forefront of innovative practice in Wales.

Following the project launch there were six themed monthly intergenerational workshops with free transport provided to each venue. This resulted in attendance figures averaging between 50 and 60 at each workshop. Please see the below links providing an overview of the engagement methods and community response within each workshop.

<https://we.tl/t-f50dUekMXG>

<https://vimeo.com/312527031/b2e7de372b>

The project’s facilitation by local volunteers has provided skills for work for the younger participants, resulting in the development of three volunteering roles, clearly supporting the sustainability and financial governance of the project for further delivery during 2019.

One of the many positive outcomes from the project is that local GPs now give ‘social prescriptions’ referring patients to the workshops and clearly advocating the success that the project has delivered in supporting our wonderful and vibrant community in Blaenavon.

Winners of the Best Community Engagement Award 2018

Llanelli Town Council

In 2015 Llanelli Town Council identified, through Community Consultation, concerns relating to pupil road safety travelling to and from schools in the Council area. Following discussions with the Safer Routes in Communities team, it was agreed to submit a bid to the Safer Routes in Communities Grant scheme, a Welsh Government initiative hosted by Carmarthenshire County Council for a total of 5 schools and 1 college campus, with a geographical boundary area called Llanelli West Bid. To develop a successful bid, an extensive Community

Engagement process was undertaken via:

- Officers engaged with local Town and County Council Members, gaining elected support for the project and shape the initial application.
- Discussion with local AM and MP, gaining support for the project and shape the initial application.
- Existing Community Networks e.g. Llanelli Community Partnership, via meetings to develop the bid.
- Direct engagement with each Schools, via meetings with Governors, Head teachers and PTA's. Meetings were held with school Council members by inviting them to Town Council offices to meet the Town Mayor.

Through engagement, the project gained supporting letters from each PTA, School Council and Governing body. Community organisations wrote in support, including Llanelli Community Partnership, Safer Communities Action Group, local care home and Disability Centre.

The proposed project is unique, taking in Llanelli Town and Rural Council areas, 5 schools, 1 college covering an estimated population of 22,000 residents. The application was submitted to Carmarthenshire County Council who chose it as their preferred project for submission for Welsh Government funding. The application was noted as exceptional due to its Community Engagement and ambitious scale.

The next project development step saw a working group formed between the Town, Rural and County Councils. Engagement roadshows were implemented across the Community with 5 events advertised on Facebook, via leaflet drops and school letters home.

These engagement events gave the opportunity to shape the final bid including the actions to be undertaken with road safety improvements, and school building improvements including upgraded cycle and parent waiting facilities. This project improves the built environment across Llanelli for residents and would have taken Carmarthenshire County Council 65 years to implement without funding becoming available.

Across 5 events around 120 people attended. They directly developed the plan, providing individual school parent travel plans, map suggestions and surveys. The inputs transformed the bid which is submitted in January 2018 to Welsh Government. The total funding expected is £340,000.

Best Community Engagement Award 2017

Borth Community Council

Background

Our community is susceptible to coastal storm surges and catchment flooding with properties at risk from flooding, regular high winds and even a local bog wild fire. The community highly value this challenging location, to continue to flourish here we need to be a resilient community.

The Community Emergency Plan was born out of the need to take responsibility for our own protection against the elements which in turn helps us to create a more resilient community. The Plan is about actions to take in an emergency, working in partnership and building a community network, it has become an effective means for engaging with the community.

We have taken the lead in developing the Plan but in conjunction with Natural Resources Wales, Coastguard, RNLI, Ceredigion County Council and the community. This has brought professional organisations and residents, their skills, experience and local knowledge together for a common local cause.

Community engagement nurtures a sense of ownership, feedback is actively encouraged to ensure we get the continually evolving Plan right.

Methods used to engage with the community

- Public meetings, Community Warden meetings, Drop-in sessions
- Councillors as members of local community groups e.g. WI, Senior Citizens, Church
- Community Emergency Warden network
- Noticeboards, Community Council Facebook page and Community website:-

<http://www.borthcommunity.info/index.php/282-borth-community-council/borth-a-ynyslas-community-emergency-plan/613-borth-a-ynyslas-community-flood-plan>

- Attending Community Engagement evenings
- Community Wardens and Community residents email groups
- Text alert system (during power/landline cuts)

Community response

- Very positive community feedback
- Sharing of experiences after 2013 & 2014 winter storms and flooding
- 53 volunteer Wardens, evacuation centre volunteers. We hope most residents become Wardens.
- Wardens distributed questionnaires enabling us to reach more residents and a wider range of People.
- The highest number of villagers who have volunteered for an initiative

Evidence of success

- Brought the community together, people have got to know their neighbours and look out for each other
- The Plan website landing page records 10,794 hits
- The Plan and process has been shared with others fostering new engagement opportunities
- Residents joined related training events e.g. defibrillator training
- Natural Resources Wales 'provides an effective means of communication to key contacts before, during and after a flood incident, providing reassurance that vital information will be relayed promptly within the community to make it more resilient'
- Borth RNLI 'It has brought together many local groups and individuals who have worked together to ensure the plan successfully meets the needs of the community and the rescue services'
- Llangynfelyn Community Council 'help was invaluable... always been there to support our efforts through the process'

One Voice Wales Training

Module 8 Introduction to Community Engagement

Other One Voice Wales training courses available on a range of topics for details go to:-

<http://www.onevoicewales.org.uk/OVWeb/Default-7451.aspx>

For more information on training contact :-

Wendi Patience email: wpatience@onevoicewales.wales

Paul Egan email: pegan@onevoicewales.wales

or

Telephone the One Voice Wales Office : 01269 595400

References

Understanding Welsh Places (Institute of Welsh Affairs) - Website includes data, maps and diagrams about employment, commuting, education, retail, tourism, housing, the environment, cultural activities and languages. Community groups will also be able to contribute material. A town audit toolkit will guide you through the process of gathering information and uploading a report to the website.

Understanding Welsh Places also aims to encourage collaboration between towns across Wales. The website enables users to

compare places and discover which towns are most like their own, creating opportunities for new conversations and sharing best practice. Data captured for all towns with a population of greater than 1000.

<https://www.iwa.wales/agenda/2019/10/understanding-welsh-places/>

Shape My Town - is a practical toolkit to inspire you to play a part in shaping the places that matter to you. It will give you the tools and ideas to change and improve your town, village or public place in Wales.

<https://www.shapemytown.org/>

Vale of Glamorgan Council's - Community Mapping Toolkit

A user friendly guide to help communities understand and participate in the community mapping process. The toolkit aims to provide an overview to all aspects of community mapping including:

- **Pre-mapping** - research work, framework and community network development
- **Mapping** - undertaking the mapping work with suggestions of different ways of engaging with the community
- **Taking actions forward and maintain momentum.**

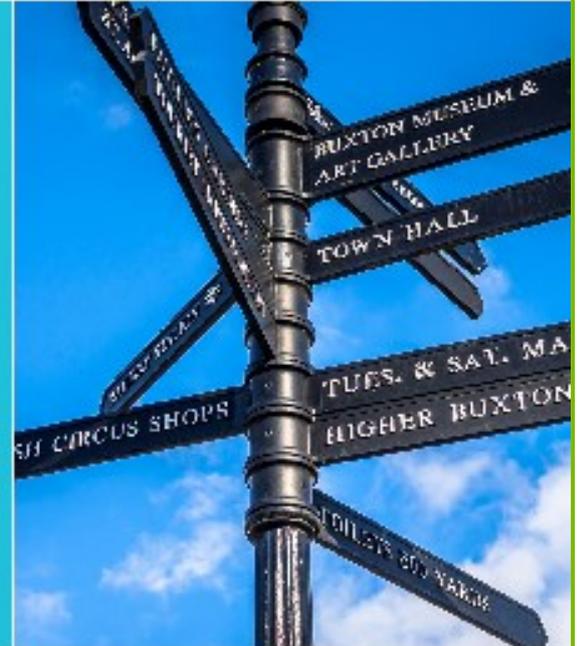
The appendices give detailed guidance on developing a community engagement plan, preparing a community engagement event, ideas for community mapping activities and an example of a community survey. You may wish to just pick out certain activities or ideas from the toolkit which your community may find useful.

It is important to be flexible in your approach to community engagement as there may need to be different approaches to different groups and communities or for a particular project.

<https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/working/Rural-Communities/Evolving-Communities/Community-Mapping/Community-Mapping-Toolkit.aspx>



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ABOUT ONE VOICE WALES

One Voice Wales is the national representative organisation for Community and Town Councils in Wales. The vision subscribed to by One Voice Wales is:

“Working with local councils in Wales to shape places communities want to live in”

One Voice Wales aims to support Community and Town Councils in achieving this vision and has adopted the following Mission Statement to guide its work:

“To represent the interests of Community and Town Councils; raise awareness and understanding of this primary tier of government; and work collaboratively with our partners to ensure the sector contributes fully to the goal of developing dynamic and sustainable communities in Wales.”

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