

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

2024 -2030



FOREWORD

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Our Corporate Strategy, "Proud of Ipswich", sets out a clear ambition to be a listening council. One where "residents can expect to be involved and engaged in the decisions which the council is making". We want residents to be at the heart of everything we do. We are committed to designing services with and around residents making sure that we provide excellent services and focus on residents' quality of life.

We cannot achieve these goals if we don't openly listen to and engage with residents. This Community Engagement Strategy sets out how we will go about being a listening council and how we will engage with residents from all the many communities that make up Ipswich. If we design services with residents, we design better services.

We know that people are passionate about the things which happen in their neighbourhoods, so we will hold local workshops and community meetings in the heart of our communities where there is an emerging topic for discussion. These will be open to all interested residents to participate and encourage the sharing of ideas to make our local spaces better.

We will use technology to carry out surveys, polls and gather residents' views, as well as using it to show what have said and what we as a council have done as a result.

We will introduce our first Resident Engagement Panel for strategic topics, ensuring the feedback we seek properly reflects the make-up of our town and is accessible. Members will be able to participate in a range of engagement activities to help ensure that we understand residents' views in detail and act on their ideas for our borough. This will ensure we are targeting our resources where we can have the most impact and where residents see the most need.



Councillor John Cook
Portfolio Holder for Sport and Communities

This approach supports our Corporate Strategy, Digital Strategy, and Customer Access Strategy and sits alongside our Communications Strategy. It will enable us to set robust, innovative and resident-led policy that ensures that our services are designed to meet the ever-changing needs and demands of life in the 21st Century.

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Our Community Engagement COMMITMENTS

Our community engagement commitments are:

01 To involve residents

We will make Ipswich a place to be proud of by encouraging and helping residents to get involved in shaping local projects and services. We will invest in our residents and the ways they can take part, making sure that we harness the passion and innovation which our residents bring to discussion.

02 To keep it simple

Engagement doesn't have to be formal or complicated. We will make it easy for residents to have their say in decisions that affect them in ways that allow them to give the level of time or commitment that suits their lives.

03 To be inclusive

We want to hear the voice of every resident and every community. We will ensure that we listen to and engage with residents who represent the diverse nature of Ipswich's population and develop the right opportunities at the right time to allow everyone to participate.

04 To be impactful

We will engage with residents at the earliest point possible to ensure they can affect real change in our decisions and shape our borough. We will make public how we act on the feedback we receive and show how engagement has shaped decision making.

05 To be skilfully delivered

Meaningful engagement is enabled by well-designed, unbiased activity design. We will ensure our employees have the skills and tools to be able to engage with residents meaningfully and to ensure good quality feedback. We will also ensure residents have access to skills development where it is appropriate to allow them to make their voices heard.

We will hold ourselves to the Consultation Institute's seven best practice principles in all our engagement activity:

- | | | |
|---------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Integrity | Transparency | Accessibility |
| Publication | Visibility | |
| Fair Interpretation | Disclosure | |



INVOLVING RESIDENTS

Our commitment is:

01 To involve residents – we will make Ipswich a place to be proud of by encouraging and helping residents to get involved in shaping local services and decisions.

We will introduce a range of tools to enable the Council to better involve residents in shaping service delivery and decision making.

These will grow and develop through the feedback of those taking part, so we are always striving for best practice and maximum impact.

These will include:

Community and Neighbourhood Meetings. Local meetings led by councillors and officers where there is an opportunity affecting a specific area of Ipswich, such as the local park being improved. This approach will allow residents to participate in the design and delivery of their own local facilities, ensuring they get the right services they need locally.

Active Community Attendance. Councillors and officers will utilise existing community meetings and events as opportunities to engage with the public and seek their views on a wide variety of topics. We will go to the places people already are and listen there.

Open surveys and polls. We will carry out open, accessible engagement using digital surveys where any resident can send a response to the council on the topics that interests them. These could be borough wide for larger issues, or more local in nature where they may be complemented by in-person activities.

Resident Engagement Panel. Residents will be invited to register as panel members to participate in more in-depth engagement activities. This group will seek members who reflect Ipswich's diverse population to make sure that we get the widest range of feedback and understand the needs of different communities. Members will be supported by council staff and access opportunities to develop their skills and supported to give their honest feedback.

Community Representatives. The Council will work with key community organisations and individuals where they are well placed to represent the views of a wider community such as those part of the LGBTQ+ community or a particular disabled persons' group. The council will seek their expert advice where a matter might affect a specific group more than others to ensure that we make the right choices and avoid accidental negative impacts.

Thematic Workshops. Focus group attendees could be drawn from the Residents Panel and Community Representatives and may be based on the demographics relevant to the topic if a particular community may have unique insights. It will allow a collaborative investigation of topics in a supportive way.





KEEPING IT SIMPLE

Our commitment is:

02 To keep it simple – we will make it easy for residents to have a meaningful say in decisions that affect them.

We will make it easy for residents to have their voices heard on the topics which matter to them.

We will value their opinions and make sure that they have a variety of ways to engage that suit their lifestyles, time and interests.

Digital presence – we will have an online presence which allows residents to find out what the council is currently engaging on, how to get involved and what the results of previous consultations have been so they can see the changes resident involvement has made. This will allow for constant opportunities to engage and ensure that residents are not left out of decision making for missing a formal meeting.

Proactive communications – we will have a strong communications plan, using social media to promote opportunities for residents to get involved and ensure we review its uptake, focusing on what method works best. This may include targeted promotions, for example to a specific set of postcodes, to maximise appropriate engagement depending on the topic. Local offline methods may be employed where the topic is place-based such as posters and leaflets in local areas.

Well designed – we will ensure our activities, tools and surveys are well structured and unbiased to allow all views to be given, and don't seek to avoid opinions where they are relevant to the topic. They will be accessible in their design to allow for wide inclusion, and we will be conscious of our language and tone to deliver the best results.

Reciprocal in nature – we will ensure that we provide the right information and detail to allow residents to learn about topics and share their informed views. For those more engaged participants, we will seek to invest in their skills and confidence to be able to fully participate in the activities and develop peer groups to allow collective development.

In good time – our consultation and engagement activities will be completed at the earliest possible opportunity so residents are genuinely able influence design and decision making and we will give residents enough time to be able to participate fully. Engagement will not be a tick-box exercise as we are committed to listening and creating positive impact.

Clear in intent - we will be clear about why we are engaging, how the results will inform decision making or shape services, being honest about any restrictions or limitations that might prevent us from taking particular courses of action such as budget or planning restrictions. We want to make the best decisions we can within the constraints we have.

Keeping your data safe – consultation often involves collecting and processing personal data. The Council will ensure that residents understand what information will be collected, why and how any personal information will be used. The data will be safely stored and only used for the purposes for which it was gathered. We won't collect what we don't need or use.

BEING INCLUSIVE

Our commitment is:

03 To be inclusive – we will ensure that we listen to and engage with residents who represent the diverse nature of Ipswich's population and value the engagement from all communities.

We value the diversity of our Borough and the fantastic culture and opportunities that brings us. It is a key part of what makes Ipswich a place to be proud of.

We see that diversity in our town and neighbourhoods. The 2021 census supports that sense of diversity in its findings that:

- Ipswich's population is close to 140,000, with 81% born in the UK.
- Ipswich is amongst the top 20% most densely populated areas in England.
- Our population is getting older though overall it is younger than the average English population.
- Around 8% of our population identify as being disabled.

We are a wide range of people and communities with a wide range of views and needs.

We have a responsibility to make sure that all residents can express their views and participate in civic life if they wish to. This means that our engagement activity must be inclusive and accessible.

Part of being inclusive is to be genuine and honest in our intent. We will not carry out consultation where we do not intend to listen to or act on the views given by residents, or where we have already made up our minds about what to do on the issue in question.

We will achieve this by:

- Ensuring that in-person engagement activities and events take place at accessible venues which are in good proximity to public transport options or parking, with assistive technology available as required.
- Making sure the language we use is clear, in plain English and free from jargon so it can be understood by all without confusion or misunderstanding.
- Ensuring that our online consultations can be accessed by participants using assistive technology such as translation tools and screen readers, and acting on feedback as new technology emerges to keep our practice relevant.
- Utilising offline options such as paper surveys and in-person discussion to include those who are unable to use digital tools.
- Using appropriate tools such as accessible transport, sign language, BSL interpreters, appropriate lighting or sound levels, and any other practical tools if needed to allow participation based on attendees' requirements. We will always seek the input of participants to reflect their individual needs.
- Respecting religious holidays and any culturally significant events to ensure residents are able to join the activities.



ACTING ON FEEDBACK

Our commitment is:

04 To ensure that we act on the feedback we receive and explain how we are doing this so that residents can feel confident their input is being meaningfully used to make change.

Where we ask residents for their time and expertise in engaging with us, we acknowledge the value of this and will ensure that it is used to affect change.

If residents are to continue to give their opinions, they will need to see that this investment from them is being utilised, or if there is a valid reason that it is not possible then the reason why needs to be clearly explained.

Through our actions, residents will be able to see the outputs of consultations such as survey results or panel members' feedback, and how the thoughts and ideas shared have influenced Council decision making.

To do this we will:

- Complete analysis of information promptly and use appropriate digital tools to allow for accuracy and speed. We will use a mix of tools to be able to present the responses clearly and accurately.
- Make the outputs from engagement activities available to both those who engaged and the wider public via the council's website and communication channels.
- Ensure that responses are analysed independently of the services area running projects, by those with the right skills to do so. This will help to ensure objectivity and make sure that we are not creating any bias in how the interpretation, giving the honest feedback from the community.
- Be clear about how the feedback has influenced recommendations in reports regarding decisions by highlighting the ways in which it has changed the design, allowed new ideas to be explored or impacted the way a service is delivered.

Failure to act on feedback from residents will disenfranchise residents and lead to a lack of take up of engagement opportunities.

It would also represent a poor use of resources and mean that the council was not keeping its commitments in the Corporate Strategy, so we have a responsibility to make sure that we act on what we hear and show how we have done it.



THE RIGHT SKILLS

Our commitment is:

05 To ensure our employees have the skills and tools to be able to engage with residents meaningfully and to ensure good quality feedback.

Quality community engagement is not easy, and there are many ways to develop skills and identify best practice.

To deliver this Community Engagement Strategy, council staff will need to be appropriately skilled, and we need to have an ethos of continual learning and development to ensure we keep pace with new opportunities and best practice, including that suggested by residents.

We want to be seen as sector-leading in our approach to working collaboratively with our residents and communities, so we need to look to our own skills to make that happen.

In particular:

- The Community Engagement team will need to be able to plan, organise, design and analyse consultation and engagement activities, advising council services on appropriate tools and techniques for use within their service areas and acting as the support for quality engagement.
- All Heads of Service and those developing services will need to understand the importance of listening and engagement to the development and delivery of their services, and appreciate that it can help deliver better outcomes for residents.
- We will need to have staff in all service areas across the council who champion engagement and collaboration with residents. These staff will be trained to design and facilitate activities to build capacity within the council to have ongoing listening activities.
- We will lead a review of where engagement will have an impact and how we best embed this in processes around project and service design so it cannot be missed, and engagement with communities becomes integral to how we operate as a council.
- Our competency framework will be updated to reflect the requirements of this Community Engagement Strategy for staff to have awareness and understanding of how to listen and engage with residents.
- Briefings will be held for councillors (including as part of new councillor induction) on the Community Engagement Strategy, its role in decision making and shaping the delivery of services and how councillors play a crucial and active role in its delivery.



MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

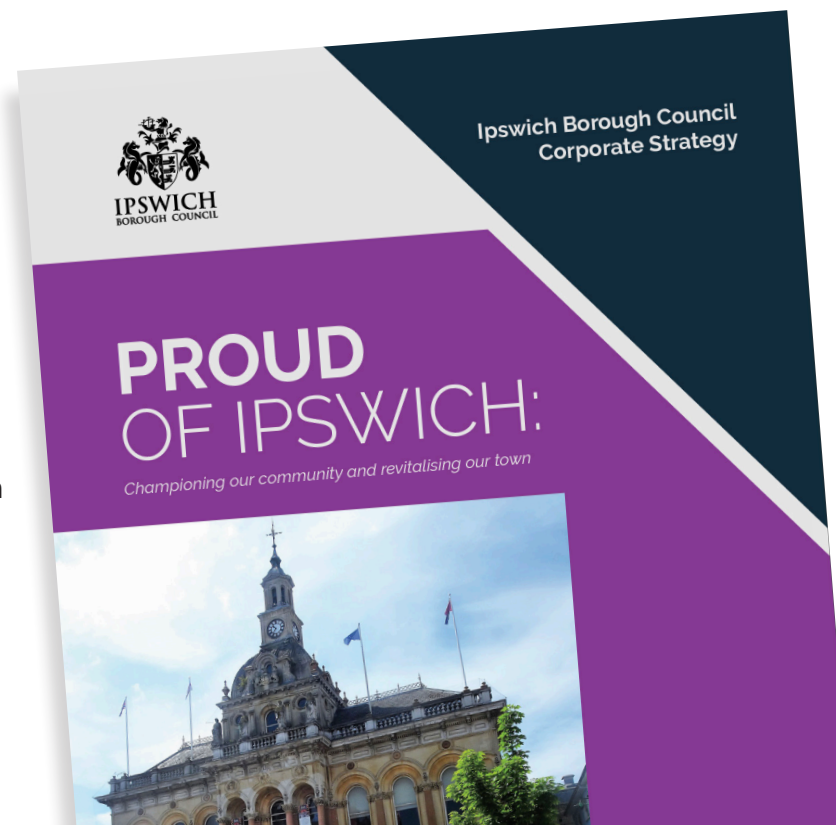
Engaging with residents is vital, but as important is showing that this enhanced listening has made a tangible difference to them, the borough and council services.

We will need to monitor the delivery and ongoing use of this Community Engagement Strategy to ensure that its objectives and commitments are being achieved and identify areas where we can continue to improve.

We will measure our success by:

- Considering what the objectives of any activity are in advance and embedding ways to measure whether each engagement activity met those objectives.
- Considering whether the right engagement methods were used and what has been learned from the experience for future improvements by reflection with officers and participants.
- Having an open approach to feedback from participants which is used to influence subsequent activities, ensuring a culture of continual improvement and development.
- Ensuring that we always work proactively to ensure our approaches engage representative groups, and use different methods where required to increase participation from groups where there is lower uptake.
- Asking services and decision makers how effective consultation and engagement has been for them in achieving their goals and follow the impact of their use of feedback to create case studies and examples for others.
- Considering whether the activities have been proportionate and cost effective for the change they have influenced, or whether the same outcome could have been delivered differently.
- Providing an annual report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on how engagement has informed decision making and seeking feedback on this from the committee on ways to improve for the following year.

We will also use our engagement opportunities to track progress on the priorities set out in the Corporate Strategy, "Proud of Ipswich" and to measure performance against some of the qualitative indicators included in the council's performance measures.





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